

Obama cranks up heat in crucial health reform week

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama launched an impassioned week-long closing campaign yesterday to drive his historic health reforms through Congress at a pivotal moment that may help define his presidency.

Obama left the White House for Ohio and an appearance designed to crank up pressure on lawmakers likely to face a knife-edge vote this week on reform aspirations that have eluded Democratic presidents for decades.

In a speech in Strongsville, Obama was expected to highlight the plight of a woman who survived cancer, but had to cancel her health insurance when her premiums rose and is now back in hospital after a relapse, fighting for her life.

Intense politicking on health care meanwhile speeded up on

Teenager

FROM PAGE 16
him on to a rickshaw near the police outpost around 8:30pm. They indiscriminately stabbed Raju as he tried to escape.

Locals rushed profusely bleeding Raju to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital where he succumbed to his injuries at 9:30pm.

According to the locals, alleged extortionists--Mahabub Rashid Rentu, Mustak Ahmed Mintu, Golam Rabbani Pintu, Rana Ahmed and Iqbal Hossain--demanded Tk 50,000 from Raju's father Esar. Refused, the extortionists and their associates swooped on Esar's jewellery shop on February 9 and injured the father and the son.

Uncertain of justice Esar filed a case with a Rajshahi court, as Baghmara police refused to record a case in this connection. The court ordered police to record the case, added the locals.

The victim's family sources said out of anxiety and sheer fear after the attack Raju went on a hideout in Rajshahi city.

Esar said police negligence killed his son. He repeatedly informed police about death threats from the extortionists, but the police did nothing. The extortionists are local BNP cadres, he added.

Officer-in-Charge Harunor-Rashid of Baghmara Police Station said he recorded a case in this connection after receiving the court's order. They have picked up one shopkeeper from the spot for interrogation.

BDR spl court

FROM PAGE 1
Complainant Nayeb Subeder Giasuddin read out the charges against the accused and urged the court to issue arrest warrants against the 69 personnel. The charges against the jawans include murders, looting arms and ammunition from arsenal and belongings of victim families, arson, assisting crimes and destroying evidence by hiding slain officers' bodies.

The court ordered to arrest the 69 jawans and to produce all the 310 jawans today.

Prosecutor Lt Col Tariq Imam Siddique gave a brief account of the February 25-26, 2009 bloodbath that left 74 people including 57 army officers killed.

He termed the massacre one of the most heinous incidents in history while narrating the act of throwing bullet-hit Maj Mokbul from 3rd floor of a building while he was still alive and groaning.

The other members of the judges' panel were Lt Col Golam Rabbani, Maj Sayeed Hassan Taposh and Deputy Attorney General Md Suhrawardy, representative of the attorney general.

Earlier on February 23, the same court started trials of 86 mutineers of Dhaka sector. The court adjourned proceedings until April 15 for framing charges against the accused.

Later at a press conference at Pikhana, Dhaka Sector Commander Col Aziz Ahmed said there were also evidence of involvement in the mutiny against Deputy Assistant Director Siraj and MLSS Saifuddin. They would not be tried for mutiny, as the BDR Act has no direction on trying a deputy assistant director

Capitol Hill with a key committee expected to consider final legislation and Democratic leaders intensifying their search for votes.

Obama's allies must piece together a 216-vote majority in the House of Representatives amid fierce Republican counter-pressure on wavering Democrats who fear a career-ending vote in a volatile election year.

The White House however predicted the House votes would be rounded up, and that Obama would be on the cusp of a legacy-building victory by the end of the week.

Billboard

FROM PAGE 1
Dhaka Medical College Hospital where the doctors declared him dead at 8:45pm.

Meanwhile, four people were injured in two different incidents at the capital's Jurain and Donia during the storm.

Jahanara Begum, 55, her son Sagor, 10, and her 20-days-old grandson Imon sustained injuries when a portion of a wall of a three-storey under-construction building collapsed on a tin-shed house at Donia.

In another incident in Jurain, roof of a tin-shed house was blown away during the storm leaving Shahnaz begum wounded. All the four injured were admitted to DMCH.

The Met office in Dhaka recorded the wind speed of yesterday's northwester at 26-56km per hour. It also recorded 22 millimetres of rain.

Sylhet, Jessore and Madaripur had 11mm of rainfall while Khulna 3mm and Chandpur 2mm. Another northwester swept through Barisal.

The Dhaka City Corporation had then taken an initiative to remove all the illegal hoardings especially, those on top of buildings and dangerous for city dwellers.

A committee was also formed to ascertain the number and locations of the risky hoardings.

Earlier on May 6, 2007, a man died and three others sustained injuries when a hoarding collapsed on a payphone shop near Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) International Airport during a storm.

The same year, a security guard of a CNG filling station at Pragati Sarani was killed when a hoarding collapsed on the station during a storm. It also damaged a number of cars parked at the station.

BSF to remove

FROM PAGE 1
Talking to The Daily Star after the meeting, Zahirul Alam said both sides agreed to maintain peace on the border.

The unresolved disputes would be taken up at sector commander or DDG-level meeting of the border forces, he added.

Zahirul mentioned that despite the decisions taken last year, the Indian border guards repeatedly resorted to 'provocative actions'. This forced the BDR troops to be put on alert.

The battalion commander-level meeting was the second of its kind in 48 hours.

The previous one was held at Padua-Protappur border Saturday afternoon after the BSF crossed into Bangladesh territory and dug 25 bunkers 100 yards inside the working boundary line between border pillars 1270 and 1271.

Meanwhile, those injured in Sunday's BSF firing in Dibir haor area were shifted to Sylhet Osmani Medical College Hospital Sunday night and yesterday morning from Jaintapur upazila health centre.

BDR officials yesterday gave them Tk 1,000 each.

Panicked villagers, mostly women and children, from Dibir Haor, Ulbari and Assampara areas, who had fled their houses for safer areas on Sunday are yet to return as an uneasy calm prevails there.

BDR officials yesterday gave them Tk 1,000 each.

Panicked villagers, mostly women and children, from Dibir Haor, Ulbari and Assampara areas, who had fled their houses for safer areas on Sunday are yet to return as an uneasy calm prevails there.

Troops join

FROM PAGE 1
On Sunday, the Water Development Board (WDB) wrote to the armed forces division (AFD) to immediately engage soldiers in repairing the damaged embankments, which flooded many villages in the two districts.

"We have requested them to engage forces as quickly as possible as we are desperate to complete the repairing works by April 15," said Director General of WDB Md Habibur Rahman.

About 1 lakh people in the worst-affected Dacope, Koyra, Ashashuni and Shyamnagar upazilas are now staying on the embankments as their homes were submerged.

The decision of engaging troops was taken against the backdrop of the failure of the WDB to repair the embankments.

WDB officials said the repairing works are being delayed because of lack of quality mud, strong current at the breach points, unavailability of contractors in time, uncertainty over source of funding and appointment of inexperienced sub-contractors for the job.

Earlier Prime minister Sheikh Hasina also ordered deployment of army in the affected areas against the backdrop of slow pace in the work of embankment by the WDB, said officials.

Following the order a team of army from Jessore Cantonment visited the affected areas last week to work out a plan for expediting rehabilitation works.

The cyclone Aila hit the country's coastal areas on May 25, 2009 claiming lives of 190 people and 150,131 livestock, affecting 3,928,238 people and damaging 613,778 houses, crops on 323,454 acres of lands and 1,742.53 km stretch of embankments, according to the official record of the food and disaster management ministry.

The ministry has already allocated a fund of Tk 116 crore for embankment repairing work. The government estimated that it would require a funding support of \$1.149 million for rehabilitation programme.

Supply water

FROM PAGE 1
environmentalist body, seeking court order to the government to ensure supply of pure and hygienic water to residents of the capital.

The HC bench comprised of Justice Md Mamtaz Uddin Ahmed and Justice Naima Haider also issued a rule upon the authorities concerned to explain within two weeks why they should not be asked to take necessary steps for supply of pure and germ-free water to the city dwellers.

It also asked them to explain why they should not be directed to use potassium permanganate, instead of chlorine, in refining water.

Excessive use of chlorine is harmful, the writ petition mentioned.

The petition quoted newspaper reports saying that Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) has been supplying stinky and unhygienic water in different areas of the city.

Respondents to the HC directives and rule include the LGRD and Cooperatives secretary, chairmen of Dhaka Wasa and BCSIR, managing director of BSTI and mayor of Dhaka City Corporation.

Advocate Manzill Murshid moved the writ petition.

Srimangal

FROM PAGE 1
cut down 3,550 trees.

The trader resumed the tree felling in the early morning yesterday at the enclosure that locals call Paan Jum of Khasia communities.

Around 250 trees were felled since Saturday.

Pijush Kanti Bhattacharjya, manager of Nahar Tea Garden, told this correspondent that as many as 450 trees near Kailin Punji of Khasia community were marked for cutting earlier, but he asked Salim not to cut those down.

He also said, while cutting down the trees, they were vigilant about protecting the betel leaf plantation in Paan Jum.

However Khasia leaders were not available here to comment on yesterday's situation.

Following a writ petition filed by the timber trader Salim, who had bought a total of 4,000 trees from Nahar Tea Garden at a cost of Tk 1.5 crore in 2008, the HC bench on February 22 gave the go-ahead for cutting down the trees as per an earlier court order.

Salim had already felled 1,200 trees immediately after getting a government permit in 2008.

Power cut

FROM PAGE 1
place in a way that maximises the productivity of workers. This has improved their worker productivity to over 50 percent. But the story stops there.

Faruque said his factories saw a 20 percent slide in productivity. "I could produce 120 T-shirts per worker an hour. Now I can do hardly 100."

Frequent power cuts are a major reason for such a loss in productivity. Workers' lack of skill is also a reason. But the other major reason is that the manufacturers are producing more and more higher-priced products which require more designs. This is needed for fetching higher prices, but at a cost of productivity loss.

Right now, the country is reeling under power and gas crises, and no end is in view within the next few years. Different gas-fired power plants having around 800 megawatt power generation capacity have remained idle due to the gas crisis. This is intensifying the overall power load shedding which tends to hover between 1,200 MW and 1,500 MW daily -- which is one third of the country's power demand.

The situation renders Bangladesh's garment industry uncompetitive. A static exchange rate for almost four years has not helped the export cause either.

These in balance leaves about 30 percent of the country's garment capacity idle, according to industry insiders. This means a lost case for 1 million workers.

The situation also does not bode well if laid in statistics. Apparel exports have been clocking negative growths for the last few months, despite Bangladesh today standing as the second largest garment exporter in terms of quantity.

From the beginning of this fiscal year in July, garment exports have been

showing a continuous negative growth, a very unusual trend for the sector. In September, it dipped by a highest 29 percent. The chill intensifies as garment accounts for about 80 percent of the country's total exports.

Manufacturers find themselves in a tight corner as order prices are falling. But this is a natural process.

"Look at the television market. Price of a TV set has come down so dramatically. The same thing is also happening in the garment sector," said David Hasanat, chairman of Viyellatex. "But we have to increase our productivity to offset falling prices. This is the challenge."

But that challenge is now seriously threatened by frequent turnover of workers, and their poor quality. It is a constant uphill battle for factories to retain workers. Once workers come and get trained, every likelihood is that they will hop jobs.

"It is a regular feature," said Faruque adding, "With the payment of monthly salaries, we find a regular migration. When it happens we suffer in production."

In a lean production line, where every job is timed to the second, it leads to a snarl-up when even a few slow workers fail to keep up in the middle. And this is happening frequently, adding to the woes from the power outage and gas shortage.

"There is no dearth of orders. The question is, can we execute them?" said Abdus Salam Murshedy, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association. "We need to bag these orders because otherwise we will see more competitors springing up elsewhere in the world. And we need the orders to keep our idle capacity running. This would make the whole garment industry healthy."

BNP MPs blame

FROM PAGE 16
team would submit a report to Opposition Leader and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

He also said based on the report Khaleda Zia would make a declaration regarding co-existence of Pahari and Bangalee in the hill tracts after discussing the matter with top BNP leaders.

Earlier the team visited affected areas in Sajek and Ganganamukh in Rangamati and listened mainly to the allegations of Bangalee settlers, as adivasi people did not gather much to talk to the team.

The adivasi people also pasted posters and banners at several parts of Dany Baibachhara, Baye Baibachhara, Retkaba, Semanachhara and Ganganamukh against BNP and Army.

"There is no scope for any debate on the issue who is Bangalee or Adivasi. We all are Bangladeshi," Zainul Abidin said.

"Bangalees have the right to live in just like the Paharis who enjoy the right of living in any places in Bangladesh. We demand the government take necessary initiative to ensure co-existence of Pahari and Bangalee in the hill areas," he said addressing a gathering of Bangalee settlers in front of Sajek union parishad.

The team reached Khagrachhari at around 1:30 pm by road and went to protest letter to the Indian authorities.

Of the recent discussions with his opposite number in India, he said killing of Bangladeshis in border areas, adverse possession of lands and drug trafficking were the issues that took precedence over others.

He asked BSF chief to take legal action instead of killing people.

For instance, he said, BDR has sought to arrest a number of Indian nationals on various charges, but did not kill any.

Replying to a query, Mainul said adverse possession of lands is a longstanding problem, much of which he believes will be resolved at the upcoming meeting of Joint Boundary Working Group.

He observed Bangladesh needs to be on a strong footing with regard to border infrastructure.

Indo-Bangla

FROM PAGE 1
Bangladeshi nationals since 2009, of which 14 were killed this year.

"Efforts to stop killing at border areas are underway. Besides, talks through diplomatic channels are also in progress," Sahara said.

The foreign minister said India has proposed for a four-day meeting of Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) from March 17 to resolve water sharing of the Teesta.

"We hope effective discussion on water sharing will be held at the meeting," Dipu Moni said.

Meanwhile, on a point of order BNP lawmaker Jamir Uddin Sircar said BSF's intrusion in Bangladesh territory through Jaintapur border in Sylhet put our sovereignty at risk.

He criticised BSF and said as per the national and international law they just cannot parade in uninvited.

Speaker Abdul Hamid, who was presiding over the session during the time, said the home or the foreign minister would soon issue a statement in parliament in this regard.

Meanwhile, in response to a query, Dipu Moni said the Indian government did not inform Bangladesh anything about deployment of 50 paramilitary personnel to enhance security of Indian High Commission.

"We don't have any information about it to share in the parliament. Diplomatic efforts might be taken on receiving a report on the matter from the ministry concerned," she said.

4-lane highway

FROM PAGE 16
The finance minister had a plan for the toll plaza road in a bid to collect tolls for the highway, they added.

However, the prime minister opposed the idea of collecting toll from the highway.

"Forget about toll collection and disburse the money immediately. Time is running out fast. We will have to complete the construction within two years," said Hasina as quoted by a source.

Sources quoted the finance minister as saying that he would disburse the funds soon.

Rid Pharma

FROM PAGE 16
company directors and pharmacists on August 10, 2009 in Dhaka, Narayanganj and Sylhet after 28 children died of renal failure between June and August due to intake of paracetamol syrup produced by the company in Brahmanbaria's BSCIC area.

The court issued an order to publish advertisement in newspaper asking the three absconding accused -- Director Abdul Goni, pharmacists Mahbubul Islam and Enamul Haque -- to appear before the court on the scheduled date.

Mizanur was sent to jail after a Dhaka court rejected his bail prayer in October last year, saying the charges brought against him are "heinous."

He along with his wife Sheuly Rahman, a director of the company, surrendered before the court following a High Court directive.

AL, BCL men

FROM PAGE 16
for taking snaps of the procession, the AL men swooped on them, injuring two reporters. Of the injured, Jugantor Haluaghat correspondent Hatem Ali was admitted to the upazila health centre.

Contacted, UNO Sonjoy Chakrabarty confirmed the incident, saying that a case was lodged with the local police station.

Later, police recovered the tender box from the river Dharsha.

In Sirajganj, police arrested a BCL activist from the premise of police super's office on charge of creating chaos and snatching tender documents from the bidders around 12:00pm, reports our Sirajganj correspondent.

The arrestee was identified as Sohel Rana, 22, of Diar Dhanghara in the town.

Yesterday was the last date for submitting tender documents on procurement of ration goods for the police super's office, police added.

At least seven people were injured in a clash between AL and BNP-backed contractors centring submission of tender documents at Hatia upazila parishad yesterday morning, reports a correspondent from Noakhali.

When some pro-BNP contractors led by former upazila parishad chairman Fakhrul Islam went to submit their tender documents, around 15-20 pro-AL contractors led by AL leaders Prince Kamal, Ekram Uddin and Mohiuddin attacked them and snatched their tender documents.

The contractors alleged that though a large number of police were deployed on the upazila parishad premises, they played the role of silent spectators.

Maliki widens lead in Iraq vote

AFP, Baghdad

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's hopes of retaining his post were given a major boost yesterday when updated election results showed a strengthening of his grip on Baghdad, Iraq's biggest province.

His success in the capital, which accounts for more than a fifth of all parliamentary seats, builds on leads in seven provinces overall, making it increasingly likely his State of Law Alliance will be the biggest single bloc in the house.

Maliki's nearest rival is leading in five provinces, though the figures remain incomplete.

Meanwhile, a suicide and car bombing struck west of Baghdad on Monday, in the first such attack since the March 7 poll, killing eight people and highlighting the security concerns which still plague Iraq.

The results from the election -- the second since Saddam Hussein was ousted in the 2003 US-led invasion -- come less than six months before the United States is due to withdraw all combat troops from the country.

Preliminary results, based on 60 percent of ballots counted, showed State of Law garnered 518,203 votes, followed by the Ibraqiya bloc of the

111 killed

FROM PAGE 16
government does not support any extra-judicial killing and it has already intimidated the law enforcers to this effect.

In response to another query, she said as many as 244 bombs and grenade attacks were occurred during the BNP-Jamaat alliance regime, killing 68 and injuring 486 people.

In connection with the attacks, 255 people were punished. Of them 54 were awarded death sentence, 84 got life term imprisonment and 117 different term imprisonment, she mentioned.

Sahara said law enforcers arrested 974 JMB and 147 Huji men and the law enforcement agencies are continuing the drive to nab others.

Robber killed in 'shootout'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

A suspected robber was killed in a 'shootout' between his cohorts and Rapid Action Battalion members in Siddirganj upazila of Narayanganj early Monday.

The deceased was identified as Din Islam alias Dina, 40, a leader of a robber gang.

The elite force claimed that two of its members also received bullet wounds during the gunbattle.

Rab and Police said a gang of criminals opened fire on a patrol team of Rab-11 in Ati Housing area at about 2:30am, prompting the law enforcers to fire back that triggered a gunfight.

Dina caught in the line of fire and died on the spot. His cohorts however managed to flee scene.

The Rab personnel recovered one revolver, one pipe gun, two bullets and a machete from the spot.

Dina was accused in 14 cases, including killing, robbery, kidnapping and extortions, police said.

Pak airports

FROM PAGE 16
West Frontier.

Major General Athar Abbas, the director general of the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), claimed that a cross-border flow into Afghanistan was hampering its campaign to crush the Taliban.

"We are at full stretch. I have to say that the border is a joint responsibility," The Telegraph quoted Major General Athar Abbas, as saying in a presentation to the Royal United Services Institute, a London think tank.

"Nato must stop the cross border flow," he said.

Pakistan has rapidly expanded its presence along the Afghanistan border, which crosses mountains and deserts, after years of complaints from Nato that it was not doing enough to stop Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters finding safe haven in its territory.

According to Major General Abbas, there are now 821 Pakistan army checkpoints on the border, but just 112 Afghan Army or Nato posts.

Pakistan officials have proclaimed the success of its operations in the autonomous territories dominated by Pashtun tribes that have sheltered the Taliban.

incumbent's main challenger, secular ex-premier Iyad Allawi, with 453,028.

The Iraqi National Alliance (INA), a coalition of Shiite religious groups, was third with around 323,975 votes.

Maliki, a Shiite who has sought to portray himself as the leader who restored Iraq's security, also holds comfortable leads in the southern oil-rich province of Basra, the third biggest in Iraq, and the central province of Karbala.

State of Law also holds leads in Babil, Najaf, Wasit and Muthanna, four other southern Shiite provinces.

Opposition blocs have alleged fraud in the election and the count, but Maliki dismissed the complaints as "very small" in nature, in televised remarks to Iraq's National Security Council broadcast late on Sunday.

13 cops sued for 'killing' Shibir leader

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

Local Jamaat-e-Islami leader Mofizul Islam yesterday filed a case with Judicial Magistrate's Court against a superintendent of police and 12 other policemen of Shibirganj Police Station for killing a Shibir leader of Rajshahi university unit.

The accused are SP Nazrul Hossain, Officer-in-Charge Fazlul Haque of the police station, SI Md Yeamin Ali, SI Waheduzzaman, ASI Rezaul karim, ASI Md Rafat Hossain, ASI Md Jahangir, ASI Aminul Islam, Constables Md Nurunnabi, Moazzem Hossain, Mazharul Islam, Amzad Hossain and driver Kawzar Jahan.

Mofizul in his statement said following SP Nazrul Hossain and OC Fazlul Haque's direction, a team of Shibirganj police led by SI Yeamin Ali "illegally" entered his house at Choitanyapur village under Shibirganj upazila of the district. As per the order from their bosses, constables Mazharul and Nurunnabi shot Hafizur Rahman Shahin dead on the spot. Police recovered the body and sent it to the sadar hospital morgue for autopsy, it added.

Shahin came to his friend Mahfuz Alam's house on February 10. After the killing, police arrested Mahfuz Alam and his father Mofizul in this connection. Later, police released Mofizul and filed a murder case against Mahfuz and three to four unidentified persons, it also said.

Magistrate Mohammad Mainuddin took the case into cognizance and said the court will wait for the investigation report of the murder case filed with the police on February 11.

Earlier SP Nazrul Hossain claimed that on information police raided Mofizul Islam's house around 2:00am where some Shibir cadres took shelter after the Rajshahi University incident. Sensing presence of police, they fired a shot. When the policemen entered the house they found a body lying on the floor.