

Democrats have votes to pass health package

Says lawmaker as US House set for voting on Obama's health plan

AFP, Washington

Democrats in the House of Representatives have garnered the 216 votes necessary to pass President Barack Obama's historic health overhaul, a top party leader in Congress said yesterday.

Representative John Larson, chairman of the House Democratic Caucus, told ABC television's "This Week" programme: "We have the votes. We are going to make history today."

The Democratic lawmaker hailed the vote as being on par with landmark social legislation promoted by US leaders of past eras.

"President (Franklin) Roosevelt passed Social Security, (President) Lyndon Johnson passed Medicare and today, Barack Obama will pass health care reform," Larson said.

He made his remarks as the House prepared to vote later in the day on Obama's plan, to provide health insurance coverage to the overwhelming majority of Americans after a year of tough debate.

Obama's quest for healthcare reform comes to a head on yesterday when the House of Representatives votes on legislation to extend health insurance to virtually all Americans.

The vote on Capitol Hill comes after a year of tough debate, months of setbacks, bitter partisanship, and legislative logjams -- and a dramatic week of chasing votes spearheaded by Obama himself.

The president led Democrats in a triumphant, fist-pumping rally on Saturday and confidently predicted Congress would rise to a century-old challenge and pass his healthcare overhaul.

"It is in your hands, it is time to pass healthcare reform for America, and I am confident that you are going to do it tomorrow," he told his allies. "Let's get this done."

The proposed overhaul, a compromise between rival House and Senate versions of the bill passed in late 2009, would bring the United States closer than ever to guaranteeing health care coverage to all of its citizens.

Using a blend of expanded

Indian police recover explosives from plane

AFP, Thiruvananthapuram

Police in India's southern tourist resort state of Kerala said yesterday they had recovered explosives from an airliner.

The explosives, made in India, were discovered as airport personnel were offloading luggage from a Kingfisher Airlines flight that had arrived at Kerala's main Thiruvananthapuram airport from Bangalore.

"The explosive was found wrapped in a newspaper," senior Kerala police officer P Chandrashekar told AFP.

It was not immediately whether the police were dealing a completed bomb or some other form of munitions.

"We are investigating the nature of the explosive and how it got into the aircraft," the officer said, adding that the passengers and crew were safe.

Security at Indian airports and on airliners has been high since a December 1999 hijack of state-run Indian Airlines plane, en route to New Delhi from Nepal, by Islamic militants.

The hijackers forced the pilot to fly the plane to Taliban stronghold Kandahar in southern Afghanistan and freed the 167 passengers and crew only after New Delhi agreed to release four Islamic militants.

In January, the federal civil aviation ministry ordered a further increase of airport security after Western intelligence agencies warned India of a possible hijack attempt by groups aligned to al-Qaeda or by Pakistan-based militant groups.

BTRC

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with the help of Rapid Action Battalion members around 11:30pm. They broke into the locked switch room of People'sTel and switched off its operations.

BTRC Chairman Zia Ahmed told The Daily Star that they also conducted a raid on the Baridhara residence of People'sTel Chairman Nurun Nabi but none was found there.

He said on average People'sTel had 24 lakh minutes' call duration a day last week but during the drive they found only 2 lakh minutes' record for yesterday, which proves the operator's involvement in the illegal VoIP business.

People'sTel has 1.40 lakh subscribers.

Delwar

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Gulshan office along with his daughter, officials at the office said.

He later attended a meeting of the BNP parliamentary board, which is the party's standing committee, to finalise nomination for the Bholo-3 by-poll scheduled for April 24. Khaleda chaired the meeting.

BNP high-up had already decided to nominate Maj (ret) Hafizuddin Ahmed as the party candidate. Hafiz was elected from the constituency several times but failed to win in the last general election.

Sources said the meeting nominated Hafiz as the party candidate in the by-poll. The Bholo-3 seat fell vacant when the Supreme Court on October 18 upheld the High Court verdict that declared illegal parliament membership of Maj (ret) Jasim Uddin, who was elected from the constituency on Awami League nomination.

Sources said a BNP delegation led by its standing committee member MK Anwar is scheduled to go to the Election Commission today to discuss the Bholo-3 by-poll.

'Indian' IP

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an Indian IP address that belongs to Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited, one of the largest Internet service providers in India," said SM Akash, media manager of Access to Information (A2i) team of the PMO, yesterday.

Professional hackers however use various methods to hide their real IP address and location, he said.

The Bangladesh government will ask VSNL for details of the IP address and the hacker's location, said the media manager.

Twenty district websites operated by the PMO were hacked on Saturday.

The hackers claiming to be Indian threatened Bangladesh with a cyber war if any Pakistani terrorist enters India via Bangladesh.

Home Secretary Abdus Sobhan Sikder said they restored the websites on Saturday night.

Some Hindi letters and "JAI HINDI" were posted on the hacked websites.

Dhaka-Ctg highway

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The official said they would scrap the contract with Nespak and appoint a new consultant soon as the Pakistani firm violated the agreement by not sending any representative to the site.

"We have been writing to Nespak to come and work since signing of the contract. They sent us a proposal to raise consultancy fee on the excuse of inflation and delay in finalising the project," Md Mazful Islam, the project director, told The Daily Star on Thursday.

He said there is no scope for hiking the fee before expiry of the agreement according to which officials of consultancy firm must be available at the site to give instructions to construction firms after the signing of the contract.

"It is also their job to see whether the project is implemented properly," he added.

The government has been raising the fee by 5 percent every year in line with the contract, he said.

Responding to a letter from the project director, the Pakistani company assured the Roads and Highways Department that it will send its people to work in the project in the first week of March.

"They are yet to come," said the project director.

He hinted that they would have no alternative but to cancel the agreement with the Pakistani firm for the absence of its representative at the site.

"We can't waste time for them. The construction work of the vital highway needs to be launched as quickly as

possible," said Mazful.

"The problem is according to the rules we can't do anything without the consultant's opinions," he added.

The Daily Star sent an email to the Pakistani company and is yet to receive any reply.

Chinese company Sinohydro Corporation and two local companies -- Reza Construction and Tahir Brothers Limited -- are to construct two more lanes measuring 215 kilometres in length in three years with the existing two-lane highway. Ten different construction segments are there in the project, major part of which will be done by Chinese company.

Khan Md Aftabuddin of Reza Construction Ltd said they were having difficulties in continuing their work in absence of representatives from the consultancy firm.

"However, my firm is not sitting idle. We are setting up offices and arranging accommodation for workers," he told The Daily Star.

The project director said the main construction work might start at the end of the year.

Aftabuddin, however, hoped that they would be able to begin construction work in a couple of months.

Earlier tender for the project was cancelled twice because of flaws in the process.

The highway, considered the main artery of the country's transport system, has become risky because of its narrowness and poor condition.

Survey of hills land

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was signed under the then Awami League government on December 2, 1997. All attacks were made following disputes over land ownership.

On March 11 this year, the land ministry called a meeting to discuss the CHT land survey. But the PCJSS did not send any representative to the meeting.

"I sent a letter to the ministry, saying the same old thing again that the problem has to be resolved as per the CHT accord," Santu Larma said.

Expressing disappointment at the status of implementation of the peace accord, he said all governments intend to discuss the issue with the PCJSS but none implements it. "Government changes and the new government starts discussion again from the beginning," he said.

The PCJSS will not support any land survey if it is not done as per the CHT Peace Accord, he added.

An official of the land ministry meanwhile said the government is taking initiatives to hold discussions again in CHT.

Ministry sources also said the land offices do not have proper records of the past partial surveys, which is a problem to conducting the survey.

The CHT Regulation 1900, however, does not have any

Jamaat

FROM PAGE 1
by Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) while preaching Islam.

Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed said Awami League is also a party to the media propaganda.

About the remarks of Rafiqul Islam, Mojaheed said, "It was an attempt to divert people's attention."

He was speaking as the chief guest at a rally against "propaganda and conspiracy against Jamaat" at the city unit office of Jamaat at Paltan in the city.

"Some newspapers have tried to implicate Jamaat in criminal activities several times by publishing false and fabricated news," he said adding: "Authorities of those newspapers cannot sleep in peace if Nizami and Mojaheed are not sent to jail."

They are trying to make the war crimes an issue, he said. "Journalists ask questions about war crimes issue even though the programme they are covering is not on war crimes," Mojaheed said blasting the journalists.

"Involving Jamaat in war crimes is a blatant lie. False complainants, witnesses will be placed to blame Jamaat leaders. Some newspapers and television channels are staging plays to blame Jamaat for war crimes," Mojaheed said.

Mojaheed also said the case filed against him and Nizami were ill motivated.

Jamaat's Assistant Secretary General ATM Azharul Islam said if the lower court sentences Jamaat leaders to life, they would go to the High Court.

Rafiqul Islam Khan presided over the meeting.

ILLEGAL BILLBOARD HC directive on demolition today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court will pass an order today on a writ petition filed for demolishing unauthorised billboards in the capital.

Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh (HRPB), an organisation for protecting human rights and the environment, filed the petition as public interest litigation seeking an order for demolition and removal of all unauthorised billboards hazardous to public life in the capital.

After concluding the hearing on the petition, the HC bench of Justice AHM Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik and Justice Md Delwar Hossain yesterday fixed the date for order on it.

Advocate Manzill Murshid on behalf of HRPB moved the petition, which sought the court's direction for compensation for two deaths caused by a hoarding collapse in Gulshan recently.

The petition also sought the court's direction upon the law enforcement agencies to assist the authorities concerned for demolishing the illegal billboards.

It also prayed to the court to issue a notice upon Shabbagh police to explain why they did not assist the Dhaka City Corporation authorities in demolishing the illegal billboards on March 18.

Respondents in the petition include home secretary, inspector general of police, Dhaka metropolitan police commissioner, DCC mayor, officer-in-charge of Shabbagh Police Station.

Two people were killed and eight others injured when a poorly-mounted hoarding collapsed on them in front of Gulshan Shopping Centre in the city during a storm on March 15.

Earlier, the DCC move to dismantle billboards from rooftops got stalled, as Outdoor Advertising Owners' Association filed a writ petition with the HC in the first week of August 2007.

Following an eviction notice issued by Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha against such hazardous hoardings in September 2007, the advertising owners' association also filed a writ petition with the HC.

Outlaw killed in 'shootout'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A regional leader of outlawed Gono Mukti Fouz was killed in a 'shootout' between his cohorts and law enforcers at Gobinpur village in Kumarkhali upazila of Kushtia early yesterday.

The dead was identified as Abdul Khaleq alias Jhoru, 35, son of Ali Hossain of Chapra in Kumarkhali.

A joint team of Kumarkhali police and Detective Branch, acting on a tip-off, raided a banana orchard at about 2:25am where Khaleq and his men were holding a secret meeting.

Sensing presence of the police, the gang opened fire on lawenforcers prompting them to fire back that triggered a gunbattle.

At one stage, the cohorts of Khaleq managed to flee the scene. Later, police found the bullet-hit body of Khaleq lying on the ground.

Police recovered one light gun, six bullets and a sharp weapon from the spot.

Officer-In-Charge of Kumarkhali Police Station Atiar Rahman said eight general diaries have been lodged with the police station accusing Khaleq of extortion in last one year.

Khaleq was also wanted in seven cases, including three for murder, police said.

4 power plants

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As per the policy, PDB had asked Energypac to pick two projects and leave the other two for the second lowest bidders. Then the second lowest bidders were asked to match the price of Energypac, which they refused. As a result, these projects have once again gone back to Energypac.

The PDB conducted the tender for the 10 power projects without taking prior approval of the Executive Committee on National Economic Council (Ecne) to save time. The Ecne earlier this month approved all these 10 projects.

Potato boom

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"Growers, who have failed to get slots in cold storages and do not have their own storage mechanisms, are counting losses of Tk 100 a maund as potato is now selling at around Tk 350 a maund while its minimum production cost is about Tk 450 a maund," said Jainal Abedin, a potato grower of Sonarong in Tongbari upazila of Munshiganj.

Reached over phone yesterday morning, Jainal said a potato glut compounded with space constraints and high rent of cold storages compelled many growers in the district to sell their produce at low prices and stock the surplus in the open.

Officials in Munshiganj said, over 40,000 growers in the potato-rich alluvial floodplains of this district produced nearly 1.2 million tonnes in more than 36,000 hectares of land. But 63 operational cold storages out of 71 in the district can hardly accommodate 0.37 million tonnes.

Jainal complained of cold storage owners' taking advantage of this situation and charging unusually high rent for preservation of potato for sale in future. He said the storages used to charge Tk 170 a sack (containing two maunds) last year but hiked it to Tk 220-260 this year.

Farmers in greater Rangpur-Dinajpur region, who produced over three million tonnes of potato this season, said they are also at the mercy of cold storage owners. In recent weeks, several people were injured in brawls over getting slots in cold storages and their heights.

Asked about this, the BCSA chairman however defended the rent hike. He said they are sympathetic to the potato growers. "But if I've to run my

cold storage using diesel for up to 14 hours a day out of 24 hours due to power outage, how do I manage without hiking the rent?"

Jasim demanded 20 percent rebate in power tariff for cold storages and appreciated a recent banking sector move of lowering rate of interest for cold storage owners to 10 percent from 12 percent.

Rise in cold storage rent compelled growers to seek redress from the authorities, and the Munshiganj district administration convened a least four meetings in last one month to make the storage owners agree to lowering the rent but to no avail.

The owners skipped the last two of the four meetings.

The BCSA chairman admitted this but remained firm on his position. "If we've to accept rent dictated by the DC (deputy commissioner), we can't do business.... Cold storage owners will then go bankrupt," he said.

He also held the government responsible for further worsening the situation by allowing potato import from India late last year.

But the government justified allowing import saying it was done to offset the high local price at that time.

Following a potato glut in fiscal 2007-08 with an output of 9.2 million tonnes, its production in 2008-09 dropped to 6.7 million tonnes, pushing up its price.

"Government allowed import despite our pleas not to do so. Later, import was stopped but by that time 14,000 tonnes had already been imported," said Jasim.

Japan MPs

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from 7:00pm yesterday with the premier at her office. Japanese ambassador to Bangladesh Tamotsu Shinotsuka and 3 others were with them.

They mainly discussed issues relating to CHT peace accord and urged her to bring back peace in CHT, sources said.

The peace message by Nobel laureate Mairead says, "After more than 30 years of violent conflict and deep suffering, the Jumma people have a right and deep desire for justice and peace. I hope therefore that you and your Government and all parties to the conflict will increase and sustain your important efforts to move to the fulfillment of the 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord. Peace in the Chittagong Hill Tracts will give hope not only to the people of Chittagong, and Bangladesh, but also to people around the world, that peace is possible."

The signatories include 62 members of the Japanese parliament, four members of parliament and legislative assemblies of Australia, a member of constituent assembly of Australia, a member of constituent assembly of Nepal and civil society representatives of Bangladesh.

The initiative was jointly taken by Jumma Net, a Japanese NGO working in solidarity with Jumma people of CHT, Bangladesh, the CHT Jumma Peoples Network of the Asia Pacific (Australia), the Indigenous Jumma People's Network USA, and the Organising Committee Chittagong Hill Tract Campaign (Holland) with other 55 organisations worldwide.

Ministry

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Dhirendra Devnath Shambhu, and Saidu Haque echoed Prof Ashraf.

"There are embargoes on MPs. They can't talk on many issues," said Dhirendra.

Saidul said the annual development programme "was not implemented properly because of the bureaucrats' inefficiency".

Shawkat Ali however said bureaucrats prepare and implement the budget, because that is their job.

"The question is how seriously we do our jobs," the deputy speaker told the MPs.

"Bureaucrats work on the political decision of the government," he added.

HC rejects

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The deputy commissioner of Narayanganj on February 9 issued a notice asking the five companies to remove their jetties by February 20 in line with the HC directives.

The five companies filed six petitions with the HC on different dates of this month seeking the stay order.

They stated in the applications that the HC judgment should be amended, since it earlier directed the government to remove all the legal and illegal structures from the rivers.

They also claimed that their jetties have been legally set up on obtaining lease from Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority.

OMS dealership

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appointment of dealers. Contacted, Khulna City Corporation (KCC) Mayor and president of city Awami League (AL) Talukder Abdul Khaleque said he was not aware of the matter nor he was concerned with the function of appointing OMS dealers.

Talking to The Daily Star, organising secretary of ward No. 6 Awami League Tulshi Kumar Das said he has so far taken delivery of 29 metric tons of rice for open market sale. "I have sold at least 80 percent of 29 metric tons of rice at the price fixed by the government. Remaining quantity would be sold soon," he added.

This correspondent found over a hundred of men and women sharply reacting in front of a grocery shop at Diana area failing to buy OMS rice from Tulshi at ward No. 6. Tulshi is using the shop of a person for selling rice, as he has no shop of his own.

Many of them alleged that sale begins at 8:30 am and closes after an hour everyday.

However, Tulshi denied the allegation saying that he sells the entire quantity of rice everyday. "But the supply fails to meet the growing demand as I get only 1000 kgs of rice for sale in the open market," he said.

Wasa

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and Rajuk saying it is their corruption and lack of coordination and foresight for which Dhaka is ranked among the worst liveable cities.

"Development is taking place in the capital, but people are not getting its benefits," Rahmat Ali said, adding, development is rather hampering daily life of the city dwellers.

"The city dwellers don't have anyone from who they can seek remedy for their sufferings. There are DCC, Rajuk and Wasa. But people are fed up with their services," he observed.

The committee cited reports on filthy water carried by The Daily Star on March 6 and 21 and asked Wasa to resolve the problems immediately.

According to official record, dealers have lifted 775 metric tons of rice from CSD godown between February 8 and March 10 while 660 metric tons have so far been sold.

President of ward No. 17 Awami League Md Nurul Islam who is appointed a dealer claimed that he is a genuine rice trader although he has no shop of his own. "I purchase rice and paddy from different mills and sell it to different markets of the district at wholesale rate. I have