

Obama faces rare defeat on health help for jobless

AP, Washington

If Chuck Lacasse had gotten his pink slip four days earlier, Uncle Sam would have covered most of his family's health insurance while he looked for a new job.

But Congress allowed emergency health care assistance for unemployed workers to expire May 31, and seems unwilling to renew it despite pleas from President Barack Obama.

Not three months after lawmakers passed his \$1 trillion insurance overhaul, Obama is facing a rare defeat on health care at the hands of his own divided Democrats. Moderates have rebelled against adding billions more to the deficit in a treacherous election year.

"The same Congress that spent all this political capital trying to get people health insurance is going to take a crucial benefit away from unemployed people," said Andrew Stettner, deputy director of the National Employment Law Project, which advocates for the unemployed.

On June 4, Lacasse lost his job as advertising director for a company that makes nutritional supplements. He'll soon have to pay the entire \$1,500 monthly premium to keep his family covered under his former employer's health insurance plan.

Until May 31, under Obama's economic stimulus law, the government provided a 65 percent subsidy. That would have lowered his cost to \$525.

"This really isn't about welfare," said Lacasse, 40. "It's about buying people some time. In a position as specialized as mine, it would have been nice to know that I had some time to look for the right job." He lives near Green Bay, Wis., with his wife and two children.

Democratic Sens. Bob

Casey of Pennsylvania and Sherrod Brown of Ohio have introduced a measure that would allow the program to continue helping people who get laid off through Nov. 30. That would cover Lacasse.

The lawmakers, who are seeking a vote this coming week, want to attach their nearly \$7 billion provision to must-pass legislation that would extend unemployment benefits and make changes in dozens of federal programs. But a similar proposal was dropped from the House-passed bill, and Senate Democratic leaders also omitted it from their version.

"I'm concerned about it," said Washington Sen. Patty Murray, a member of the Democratic leadership. "There will be people who fall through the cracks."

Under a 1980s law known as COBRA, laid-off workers generally can stay on their former employers' health plan for up to 18 months, provided they pay the full premium plus a small administrative charge. But with family premiums averaging about \$13,500, the cost is prohibitive for most people.

That changed under the 2009 stimulus bill and subsequent expansions, which provided a 65 percent federal subsidy for up to 15 months. Workers laid off through May 31 can qualify for the benefit through their former employer.

"It has been a significant program and it has helped many middle-class families to keep their health insurance at a time when maintaining health insurance was difficult because of the high rate of job loss," said Alan Krueger, the Treasury Department's chief economist. Official statistics on how many people were helped have yet to be compiled, but Krueger estimates that as many as one-third of eligible unemployed workers enrolled in subsidized coverage.

Vehicles of death

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crossing, said, "As the bus rammed the bike, the woman was tossed onto the road. The man was dragged for around five yards before his head went under the wheels."

Locals rushed Shampa to Holy Family Hospital. She was bleeding profusely from the head. Police took Shaheen's body to Dhaka Medical College Morgue.

Russell, another eyewitness, said the driver and his assistant fled the bus, leaving the engine still revving.

Shibli Noman, officer-in-charge of Ramna Police Station, said the bus hit the bike shortly after both had crossed the level crossing and been heading towards the intersection.

An angry mob damaged the killer bus. Traffic movement on the busy thoroughfare, however, was not disrupted, as police reached the spot immediately, OC Noman added.

Locals alleged the policemen on duty at Moghbazar intersection, around 10-15 yards off the scene, had looked on, as the bus driver and his helper escaped through the crossing.

Meanwhile, a deathly hush fell on the house of Shampa's parents who live nearby their daughter's flat in Rampura Mahanagar housing.

Nurunnahar, the mother, passed out as the news came turning her world upside down.

She did not only lose her daughter, but also the first grandchild she and her husband had been longing to greet.

When Shampa conceived six months ago, it brought in a rush of joy to the family. The elderly couple had been passing the best time of their lives, weaving clothes and quilts and buying things necessary for a newborn, said Mahfuzur Rahman, a cousin of Shampa.

Nazmul Huda Shamim, Shaheen's younger brother, said Shaheen-Shampa got married around three years ago.

Shampa, who hailed from Jessore, joined Janakantha only a year back, while her husband had been working at Structural Engineering Ltd for a few years.

Shaheen used to take Shampa to Janakantha office on New Eskaton Road and then go to his office on Panthapath.

The bodies were taken to Shaheen's village home at Faridpur Sadar for burial, he

added. Shampa's relatives filed a case with Ramna Police Station yesterday.

One person gets killed and many more are wounded in road accidents in the city on average every day.

According to police, 98 percent of the accidents happen due to reckless driving. The usual culprits are minibus, buses and other public transport.

Statistics of Accident Monitoring Cell of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority and Dhaka Metropolitan Police say 377 people died in 620 accidents in Dhaka in 2008. Of them, 283 were pedestrians.

Argentina

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unmarked Heinze hurtling in late and the Marseille defender headed powerfully past Enyeama to send the large contingent of Argentine fans wild.

Argentina had numerous scoring chances, none more so than Messi's charge on goal nine minutes from time.

Yet again he was thwarted by Enyeama's blocking feet to keep the Nigerians in the game.

On another occasion Carlos Tevez triggered a counter-attack from deep inside his own half in the 65th minute and set up Messi only for him to shoot agonisingly past the post with Enyeama beaten.

Left-back Taye Taiwo came closest for Nigeria in the second half with his thumping volley just fizzing past the far post on 71 minutes.

But the Nigerians made the openings only to spoil their chances with errant finishing with Hoffenheim's left winger Chinedu Ogbuke Obasi going close on a couple of occasions in the first half.

Argentina's Newcastle United defensive midfielder Jonas Gutierrez and Nigeria midfielder Lukman Haruna picked up yellow cards in the match.

Argentina have won all three of their matches with Nigeria at the World Cup after winning 2-1 at the 1994 tournament in the USA -- Maradona's last international appearance as he was then sent home in disgrace for failing a drugs test -- and 1-0 at the 2002 Korea-Japan edition.

Nigeria's last victory at the World Cup was back in 1998 when they beat Bulgaria 1-0 and since then the Super Eagles have lost five games and drawn one.

Viqarunnisa gets new principal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The governing body of Viqarunnisa Noon School and College yesterday appointed Hosne Ara Begum as the principal of the institution, says a press release.

The press release signed by personal secretary to the president of the governing body of the college, Abdul Khalek, said the decision was made according to the directive of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Board, Dhaka.

According to the board's directive, the governing body had appointed assistant professor of English department Shaila Ahmed as the acting principal and set the date of interview to appoint a fully-fledged principal.

But the interview could not be held as former acting principal Rokeya Akter filed a writ with the High Court challenging the legality of appointing a new principal, says the press release.

The press release also said, the High Court dismissed the writ on June 8 and the governing body completed the interview and appointed Hosne Ara Begum as the principal as she stood first in the interview among 20 candidates.

Hosne Ara Begum is currently the principal of Azampur Girls School and College.

Mahmudur

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case filed against several members of the outfit on charges of carrying out militant activities across the country.

The case was filed on April 16 with Uttara Police Station. Hizb ut-Tahrir chief Mohiuddin Ahmed and a few others were also shown arrested in the case, and they were placed on remand several times.

Inspector Nurul Amin, investigation officer of the case, yesterday sought permission from the court to take Mahmudur on the remand for interrogation.

In a forwarding report, Nurul Amin said Mahmudur has a link with Hizb ut-Tahrir leaders including its chief Prof Mohiuddin.

Moreover, the printing press of the daily printed leaflets of the banned organisation, he added.

Meanwhile, Metropolitan Magistrate Kamrun Nahar yesterday rejected a bail petition filed by Mahmudur after Tejoan police produced him before the court on expiry of a three-day remand.

Earlier, he was taken on the remand in connection with a case filed for preventing the police from discharging their duties on June 2.

During the yesterday's hearing on the bail petition, Mahmudur told the court that he was taken to Cantonment Police Station though Tejoan police took him on the remand.

He was tortured in the name of interrogation, Mahmudur said.

On June 8, he was also remanded for four days in another case filed for holding a "secret meeting" with various government officials of different levels on November 24, 2006 at the office of Artisan Ceramics Ltd in the city's Uttara area.

Tejoan police arrested Mahmudur from Amar Dosh office in Karwan Bazar on June 2 after the daily's publisher Hasmat Ali Hashu filed a fraud case against him.

Financial help

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102 dead persons from 67 families.

The list will be handed over to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in a day or two, he added.

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) sources said the premier herself would hand over Tk 1 lakh to each family.

The list has been hung on a board at Nimtoli. If any person or family eligible to get the PM's grant remains missing from the list, the person concerned is requested to contact with Nirrod Chandra Mondal. His cellphone number is attached with the list.

DCC Ward-69 councillor Mohammad Mohan said the councillor's office has been working on the list from the beginning.

Many relatives of injured and affected persons have contacted with the ward councillor's office in the hope of getting the prime minister's assistance.

Excess ministry

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spent on any service during a financial year in excess of the amount granted by the House for that purpose, the public accounts committee will examine with reference to the facts of each case the circumstances leading to such an excess and make such recommendation as it may deem fit.

A senior official in the parliament secretariat said the parliamentary body cannot exercise its jurisdiction this year too as the revised budget was never sent to the committee for examination. The committee did not move on its own to exercise its jurisdiction since the rules of procedure were enacted in 1973, he added.

The House however will hold a brief discussion on the supplementary budget with its sitting resuming this afternoon. The Business Advisory Committee of parliament led by the speaker allocated only five hours for the discussion. The supplementary budget is set to be passed on Monday, the official said.

The official however cannot specify the ways how the committee will examine the reasons for excess expenditure whether the House sends it to the committee or does the task all by itself.

Contacted by The Daily Star yesterday over phone, Speaker Abdul Hamid said the public accounts committee can hold discussion on the revised budget if it wants. He added the committee might have held a discussion on it by this time.

Member of the committee and senior parliamentarian MK Anwar however said they didn't hold any discussion in last two days since the revised budget was placed in parliament on Thursday.

Anwar, also a former BNP minister, said the House should examine the excess expenditure through its committee to know the reasons for excess expenditures to ensure accountability of the executive to the legislature.

Kidney patients

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The air coolers were not working since the morning though some fans and lights were on from 8:00 am to 12:30 pm getting power from the generator, which remained stopped, they said while talking to this correspondent at 1:00pm yesterday.

Six-year old Arafat was vomiting continuously for excessive heat at the post-operative ward while his mother was holding a hand fan to cool her baby.

No pathological tests and Lithotripsy (medical fragmentation of stone) took place yesterday while X-ray and ultrasonogram was stopped at 12:30pm.

Ali Akbar, a 52-year-old man who has been suffering from kidney problem, was sitting in front of the counter at 1:00pm as the doctors asked him for urine and blood test.

"I am waiting here for two hours. But no body told me anything," said Akbar who came from Gopalganj.

The pathologists said every day around 100 or 120 patients come for pathological tests. But no pathological tests were carried out yesterday due to the power outage from 8:00am to 2:00pm.

"If power does not come by 2:00pm, we will not be able to

But he said the House never allowed its committee to exercise the authority. "If we want to engage people's voice in the government expenditure, the system must be introduced," Anwar said.

Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, chief of the public accounts committee, however said the overall expenditure of the current fiscal is less than the amount granted by parliament.

When his attention was drawn to the non-development budget that shows some ministries spent excess amount of money, the committee chief said the expenditure is not much in excess than the allocation.

The revised budget shows, for example, the parliament secretariat spent Tk 73 crore against allocation of Tk 59 crore, the Prime Minister's Office spent Tk 151 crore against allocation of Tk 93 crore, Cabinet Division Tk 31 crore against Tk 19 crore, the establishment ministry Tk 740 crore against Tk 663 crore, foreign ministry Tk 571 crore against Tk 357 crore, defence ministry Tk 7,743 crore against Tk 6,790 crore, home ministry Tk 5,729 crore against Tk 5,254 crore, education ministry Tk 7,520 crore against Tk 6,294 crore and water resources ministry spent Tk 698 crore against allocation of Tk 547 for non-development budget in the current fiscal.

7 fined

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microbus that did not mention the printing date at the bottom.

The mobile courts on Friday fined two candidates Tk 2,000 each in West Madarbari (ward-29), two candidates Tk 3,000 each in West Bakolia and Pathantuli (ward-17 and -28) and two candidates Tk 2,000 each in South Pahartali and South Halishahar (ward-9 and -39).

Names of the fined candidates could not be known.

8 accused in death

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Station include Rita's husband Rashedul Kabir, his father journalist Shafiqul Kabir, mother Noor Banu, brother-in-law Delwar Hossain, sisters Kabita and Sukhan, second wife Smriti and driver Al Amin.

Rita's mother Mazedha Begum filed the case under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act on Friday night.

Police suspected that they committed suicide by taking sedatives.

Asked about this, the officer in charge of the police station said Mazedha complained that the accused used to unleash mental torture on Rita and her two children which compelled them to commit suicide.

None of the accused was arrested till yesterday evening. Contacted over phone, Shafiqul Kabir said the allegations brought against him and his family members in the case are baseless.

He said Rita often suffered from mental depression, and it increased after his son married for the second time.

BEGUNBARI TILT Another building being demolished

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A demolition team of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) yesterday knocked down the partition walls of another four-storey building erected illegally in the capital's Begunbari area.

It is the second structure after Rajuk embarked on demolishing the seven-storey tilted one in Begunbari.

The four-storey building that houses Ahsania Ulum Hafizia Madrasa and an orphanage, happens to be within the ongoing Hatirjheel Development Project area, said Shafiqul Islam, Rajuk authorised officer.

"We will go back to the site again on Monday to complete the demolition," Shafiqul said.

Executive magistrate Rokon-Ud-Dowla led the team comprised of Rajuk Executive Engineer Jamal Akhtar and 35 labourers.

Lt. Col. Sayeed of Army Engineering Corps tasked with Hatirjheel Project implementation, Project Director Raihanul Ferdous and Rajuk Executive Engineer Jamal Akhtar were present during the drive.

The Rajuk team also continues pulling down the tilted five-storey building at Nakhalpara that they started Thursday.

15 injured as AL, JP clash in Rangpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

At least 15 people were injured yesterday in a clash between Awami League and Jatiya Party activists at Badarganj upazila complex in the district over distribution of relief rice.

Critically injured Shawkat Hossain, Shafiqul Islam, Shahidur Rahman and Bhutto Lohani were admitted to Rangpur Medical College Hospital.

The clash erupted over distribution of 315 metric tons of rice for Badarganj upazila under Test Relief (TR) Programme.

Badarganj Upazila Chairman and local Awami League leader Bishwanath Sarkar Bitu and Jatiya Party MP of Rangpur constituency-2 Anisul Islam Mandal blamed each other for the clash.

Bitu said Anisul Islam demanded 50 metric tons of rice for his constituency at the meeting in the upazila complex conference room. As there was no such provision, Kutubpur Union Council Chairman Ishtiaque Ahmed protested allotting rice to Anisul and thus both started an altercation.

A rumour spread that Bitu and his cohorts beat up Anisul Islam and his men at the meeting. Jatiya Party leaders and activists then blockaded the upazila complex and confined Bitu to his office, he added.

Eyewitnesses said Awami League leaders and activists rushed to the spot and attacked Jatiya Party activists as they heard about Bitu's confinement.

Attack and counter attack between the two groups continued till 4:30pm when police took over the upazila complex dispersing the activists.

Anisul Islam, however, denied the allegation of demanding relief rice. He said instigated by Bitu, Ishtiaque Ahmed rebuked him at the meeting without any reason.

Badarganj upazila council yesterday organised a meeting at the upazila complex to fix quota under the TR Programme. Bishwanath Sarkar Bitu presided over the meeting while Anisul Islam was present there as an adviser to the TR committee.

The upazila council chairman, its vice chairman, upazila nirbahi officer and all upazila chairmen of Badarganj were also present at the meeting.

Rainwater

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dependent on it. Meanwhile, the water demand has doubled as the population increased in the city.

Speaking as the chief guest State Minister for Science and Information Technology Yeafesh Osman said we must bring a change in our water use and go for rainwater harvesting.

He said the prime minister is very sincere about making Dhaka habitable and the government would go for alternative sources of water.

Dhaka Water Chairman Golam Mostafa said 87 percent of the supply water comes from groundwater. Water is looking for alternative water sources and has asked the institute of Water Modelling to conduct a study on rainwater use.

Rajuk Chairman Nurul Huda, architect Iqbal Habib, executive director of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association Syeda Rezwana Hasan, Country Representative of WaterAid Md Khairul Islam also spoke at the seminar.

Tough law

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Telecom and ICT stakeholders in several meetings with government high-ups urged them to drop the provisions of harsh punishment that they deemed unconstitutional.

Oddvar Hesjedal, chief executive officer of Grameenphone, said, "Under the law, there is a possibility that the regulator may claim that the operator is involved in any wrongdoing."

He said the BTRC would be the single body to play the key role in the whole affair.

"We cannot go for appeal against any decision taken by BTRC. This seems unconstitutional."

Hesjedal said many operators are hesitating to go for 3G (third generation mobile technology) because of the proposed amendment.

"We have to pay for licences and rollout. Under these circumstances, the law could be a fear factor for future investments."

Hasanul Haq Inu, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on post and telecommunications ministry, said the committee would stand against the proposed amendment.

"I don't believe parliament will pass the bill without making it suitable for the industry," he said.

He hoped that if anything unconstitutional remains in it, the House would consider it.

In Bangladesh, a telecom licence is issued for 15 years. The conditions laid down in the licence might need to be altered to keep pace with the rapid change in technology.

The bill proposed that the regulator could change the conditions in the licence without any consultation with

the operators. Hesjedal said operators pay for their licences. "So if changes are needed, it should be done in consultation with the operators."

On the proposed amendment, Ahmed Abou Doma, chief executive officer of Banglalink said, "The new telecom act is actually unconstitutional as it doesn't give the operators the right to appeal."

"You are actually threatening the existing investments in the country. That includes even arresting and putting officials of companies in custody and not having the right to appeal."

Commenting on the proposal for fine, Doma said the maximum fine of Tk 300 crore is impractical as some operators do not have a paid-up capital of more than Tk 10 crore.

"This means they are not being penalised, they are being put off business and moreover arrested. What kind of investment climate is this?"

The maximum fine for such offences is \$2.5 million in Asian countries, he said.

Mahbub Zaman, president of Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services, said such a law would send a wrong message to the tech savvy generation.

It would discourage prospective investors from putting money in Bangladesh's telecom and ICT sector, he said.

Telecommunication penetration is only 34 percent in Bangladesh. More than 56 million people now use mobile service while only 1 million people have access to the internet.

Development

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Majority of the young chose Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Kazi Nazrul Islam as their role models. However, 17 percent of the young people surveyed revealed that they do not have a national role model. US President Barack Obama was revealed as the most preferred international role model.

According to the study, 73 percent of the youth own a mobile phone but 85 percent said they do not use the Internet.

"The report is a rich food for thought," said British High Commissioner Stephen Evans.

It does not try to be prescriptive, rather it gives statistical information that would make people think and is bound to be a topic of debate in the future, he said.

British Council Director Charles Nuttall, noted music personality Ayub Bachchu and Active Citizen and Youth Representative Tisha Meher also spoke at the result unveiling programme.

Nepal

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The move is in retaliation to the Maoists possessing their own army, the People's Liberation Army, and a paramilitary unit, the Young Communist League (YCL).

The other major party in the alliance, Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal's Communist Party of Nepal- Unified Marxist Leninist, has its own quasi-paramilitary unit, the Youth Force, which has been clashing with the Maoists since its inception.

The NC private army comes as the party is struggling to find a new leader to succeed Girija Prasad Koirala, the former premier who exercised an iron grip on the party right up to his death.

While Deuba is a claimant, he faces at least three challengers in the party that has seen several splits in the past.

The acting chief of the party and Koirala's cousin Sushil Koirala has already issued a public warning, opposing the private army and saying those promoting it would face punitive action.

The ruling party's private army comes at a time the peace process has come to a standstill with the government failing to draft a new constitution within the prescribed two years.

Now it is uncertain if the statute will be drafted by 2011. The impasse is mainly over the Maoist army and the YCL the ruling parties want disbanded while the former rebels are asking the prime minister to quit.

Two major parties from Nepal's volatile Terai plains have their personal armies while several minor parties and underground groups also lay claim to their own 'defence forces'.

There is a large number of unregistered arms in Nepal, much of which is bought in India across the border and smuggled in.