

Iraq's new parliament convened

REUTERS ONLINE

Iraq's parliament convened yesterday for the first time since a March election, cloaked by heavy security a day after gunmen and suicide bombers raided the central bank in a sign of continued lawlessness and instability.

The new 325-member parliament will be tasked with drafting legislation on a slew of economic issues as the country tries to move beyond the sectarian violence unleashed after the 2003 US-led invasion and set off on a path of economic development.

"On behalf of the Iraqi people we open the first session of parliament," said re-elected Kurdish lawmaker Fouad Masoum, one of the chamber's oldest members and picked to open the session.

The inaugural parliamentary session more than three months after the March 7 vote was a major step toward the establishment of a government but it appeared likely it would still take weeks for political factions to agree on a choice of prime minister.

Sunni Islamist insurgents have sought to exploit the sectarian tensions generated by the extended political vacuum through bombings and assassinations.

Recent weeks have also

China keen

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Jinping also mentioned that Bangladesh has a long historic relation with China. "Bangladesh has developed a lot after its independence and the living standard of the people is improving day by day," he said.

He said if this development could continue Bangladesh would be able to attain a big growth in the near future.

The Chinese vice president said that after Sheikh Hasina's recent visit to China the relations between China and Bangladesh witnessed a big boost.

Speaking at the banquet, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said she believes that the visit of the Chinese vice president would add depth and dimension to the existing bilateral relation between the two friendly countries.

She also congratulated Jinping for the successful holding of Shanghai World Expo-2010.

The premier appreciated the warm Chinese hospitality that was accorded during her visit to China early this year.

"China and Bangladesh enjoy sound friendship based on equality, mutual respect and trust, and non-interference in each other's internal affairs. We are steadfastly committed to 'one China' policy," she said.

Hasina said the diplomatic relation that was established 35 years ago is now enjoying a "close comprehensive partnership of cooperation."

The six China-Bangladesh friendship bridges, the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre and many other projects by China testify to this partnership, she said, adding, "These projects truly contributed to Bangladesh's socio-economic development."

Student councils

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Class III to Class V would be the candidates and be elected by students of same classes.

A class V student selected by the school would perform as the election commissioner in the election, they add.

The elected council may nominate two associate members who would give all-out help to the elected representatives.

The elected representatives would nominate the chief representative in the first meeting of their council, the officials add.

The chief representative would disburse the work area of other members on the basis of consensus with the help of the headmaster. There would be monthly meetings of the councils where the teachers would assist them.

Primarily, the council would involve in the activities including preservation of surrounding environment of the school; health, sports and cultural activities.

seen a spate of raids on banks and gold markets blamed by the authorities on insurgents seeking funds. But Shia militia groups that took up arms after the invasion have also turned to crime as sectarian warfare fades.

The number of civilians killed each month since March has increased slowly but steadily, raising questions about whether the US government can stick to its plan to end combat operations in August ahead of a full withdrawal in 2011.

Suicide bombers and gunmen on Sunday stormed the heavily-guarded central bank in Baghdad, killing 15 people and wounding dozens. They did not gain access to the vaults where piles of Iraqi dinars and US dollars are stored, but fought an hour-and-a-half-long gunbattle with Iraqi security forces.

SUNNI-BACKED ELECTION WINNER

A cross-sectarian alliance led by former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi won the most seats in the March election after gaining strong backing from Iraq's once dominant Sunni minority, but it fell far short of a governing majority.

That has led to weeks of political wrangling as political groups sought to build coalitions that would give them the clout needed to pick the next government.

Menon

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independent investigation into the allegations of admission trade at the college," Menon told journalists at a press conference at Shaheed Asad auditorium in the city's Paltan area.

The press conference on the recent row over appointing a new principal at the college eventually turned into a press briefing on admission trade.

About the allegations of admission trade against him, Menon said those were ill-motivated.

He, however, admitted that he had made some recommendations for seats to the then acting principal Rokeya Akter Begum.

"In my long political life I have made many friends like ministers, lawmakers, editors and journalists. As I could not refuse many of those friends I forwarded requests for about 100 to 150 seats to the last acting principal," said Menon, adding that now that a base mark for admission has been set, one who does not meet the criteria does not get admitted.

He alleged that the last acting principal of the college was involved in admission trade in 2009 and 2010.

Contacted over the phone yesterday afternoon, Rokeya Akter said no one got admission on the basis of recommendations in 2009 and she was not involved in any kind of admission trade in 2010.

She, however, said a few cases of enrolment on political and other recommendations did take place this year.

"I could not stay at the college as I was against the illegal trade of admission. I am sure the trade will now continue at the institution," said Rokeya Akter.

2 'robbers'

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The couple taking their four-month-old son with them boarded the boat for Sharighat near Sadarhat.

The pirates came by another boat, they said.

They threatened the couple with sharp weapons and tried to rob them of all their valuables, said Officer-in-Charge of Keraniganj Police Station Abdul Bashar.

When the couple cried out for help and tried to resist the attack, the robbers threatened to throw the baby into the water, the OC added.

The OC also said when the pirates snatched the baby from its mother's lap, other boatmen of nearby boats came to their rescue. The pirates then returned the baby and jumped into the water to escape.

The boatmen started beating them with oars, and at one point they dragged the three to the riverbank near Zinjira Alam Tower where locals also joined in.

Later, police rescued them and rushed them to the hospitals.

The OC said the identities of the couple could not be known as they had left the scene.

In another incident at Paina Nayagaon in South Keraniganj, a mob beat to death a youth in the early hours yesterday for his suspicious movement.

Police said locals suspected that Minu was a mugger, and attacked him.

He succumbed to his injuries at Mitford Hospital.

"As we move towards fulfillment of our vision 2021 and Golden Bangladesh as envisioned by father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, we are confident; we shall find China by our side as our unwavering friend."

The premier underscored the need for continued bilateral visits for mutual interest.

Industries Minister Dilip Barua, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury, LGRD Minister Syed Ashraful Islam and Speaker Abdul Hamid, among others, attended the banquet.

These are necessary for attaining the objectives of Digital Bangladesh—an ICT-based middle-income country with a better standard of living for the people--by 2021, Hasina said.

She said to facilitate expedited realisation of these and other excellent initiatives of her government are bent on eliminating corruption as well as safeguarding peace and stability, and importantly in consolidating the democratic process.

"I believe, early implementation of the four agreements and Memorandum of Understandings signed during my visit to China and the new areas of cooperation identified at today's meeting would further boost our mutual gains and benefits."

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"Fires might occur anytime, if we do not stop the business of flammable goods," he said.

Architect Iqbal Habib, who also works in urban planning, said some 12 to 15 major fire incidents are reported every year in the old town.

The speakers called upon Old Dhaka residents to make the Panchayet functional and unite against the ongoing business of flammable materials in residential buildings.

"We have to decide whether we will live with the explosives or stop the business," said Mohammad Shahid, a resident.

Wahidul Islam, general secretary of the Ali Neki Deuri Panchayet, said, "Ninety percent factories in the area keep running even after 8:00pm, disrupting sleep of people. If the Panchayet had functioned well, it would not happen."

Bangladesh Paribesh Andolan and Sheikh Borhan Uddin Post Graduate College jointly organised the programme at the college.

The residents urged the government to move the stores of flammable materials and other factories from the area immediately.

Speaking in the session, Bangladesh Paribesh Andolan President Prof Muzaffar Ahmad said nobody has the right to earn money risking the lives of others. He called upon locals to unite and stop the trade of materials that may harm people.

Superintending Engineer Arman Hossain said, "We will now take the playground back and maintain it on our own."

Zillur Rahman, owner of an evicted shop, said, "The people of the Society took Tk 30,000 against each shop for three months."

He also claimed that DCC is conducting routine repair works of footpaths. However, continuous digging by utility services for various development projects keeps the city corporation under pressure.

About ouster of the headmaster in January, the lawmaker said nobody has the right to earn money risking the lives of others. He called upon locals to unite and stop the trade of materials that may harm people.

Through this practice the students will be aware about their responsibilities and leadership qualities will grow in them, the acting secretary observed.

The chief representative would disburse the work area of other members on the basis of consensus with the help of the headmaster. There would be monthly meetings of the councils where the teachers would assist them.

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Supplementary

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Only ten lawmakers including three with ministerial posts were given floor to participate in the discussions on it in the last two days.

The lawmakers made no effort to examine the reasons behind the additional spending. Most of them rather lauded the government's performance in implementing the budget for the outgoing fiscal year.

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury started a discussion on it in the House on Sunday and justified the additional spending.

Finance Minister AMA Muhiith wrapped up the discussion yesterday, thanking the participants.

Fifty lawmakers had taken part in the discussion on the supplementary budget for 2008-09 fiscal year for over six hours. But the House this time spent two hours for discussion on the supplementary budget for the outgoing fiscal year and another hour for completion of other procedures.

The public accounts committee did not initiate examining the reasons behind the additional spending in line with the rules of procedure of parliament after the supplementary budget was placed on Thursday.

There is no denying the fact that we have limited capacity to implement the annual development programme (ADP) in the next fiscal year would be close to the target.

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bodies where no development will be permitted. Noted urban and environment experts Prof Nazrul Islam, Syeda Rizwana Hasan, Iqbal Habib and some newsmen were present there in that meeting.

In his reaction, Jamil Reza said land developers have taken control over a good portion of land in flood-flow zones and put signboards there and have been selling plots for years.

"And, now they are showing the audacity at the Secretariat, mobilising support from a state minister," he said, adding that it was very surprising that another MP was so critical of the government.

Ruling Awami League lawmaker Nasrul Hamid Bipu, president of Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (REHAB) and also chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on the housing ministry joined land developers bashing Rajuk on Sunday.

The finance minister outlined the performance of ministries and divisions spending additional money. He also gave a few reasons behind the additional spending and justified it.

Muhiith said the budget implementation system is poor and needs to be improved.

He however hoped the implementation of the annual

development programme (ADP) in the next fiscal year would be close to the target.

"It is an absurd and unfortunate incident. No work in the country can be done if things like this continue," Prof Nazrul Islam told The Daily Star.

Terming land developers' attitude unacceptable Syeda Rizwana Hasan, executive director of Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association, said, "Their attitude shows how blindly the businessmen have been getting support and shelter from the government. Now they don't care anything, even a minister."

Architect Iqbal Habib said the developers with audacious behaviour not only disgraced the people but also the government. It is expected that the government implements the DAP immediately, he added.

Prof Jamil Reza said the DAP Review Committee report is a continuation work of a gazette notification published in 1997 but the land developers went ahead developing land on flood-flow zones.

The committee in the report concluded that no unapproved project on flood flow zones would be allowed. The Purbachal and Jhilmil Phase-1 projects were approved, he said.

The committee even viewed that some government projects also had non-conformity with DAP he said.

Prof Nazrul Islam told The Daily Star the state minister for housing has been quite sincere about DAP and the decision was not made by him alone. He said it was done after discussing with all stakeholders and adequate scrutiny.

Earlier, participating in the budget discussion, Mannan briefed the premier about Sunday's meeting where he had a heated argument with land developer leaders.

At Sunday's meeting, the realtors bashed him and Rajuk officials over the draft DAP, which reserves 21 percent of the capital's area as water bodies that cannot be filled in.

Hasina observed land grabbers have made thousands of crores of taka thanks to "backing of past governments". They gave plots to politicians to have them on their side, she alleged.

Earlier, participating in the budget discussion, Mannan said land grabbers are threatening the government in broad daylight, as it is trying

to save rivers, canals and other water bodies.

He said some land developers first buy a half-katha land at one end and another half-katha at the other, and later grab the entire land in

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