

Taliban warn

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before taking a decision on the matter.

Obaidul Quader, presidium member of the ruling Awami League, said since it is a policy issue, the government would decide on it after discussion in parliament.

"The US can make a request, but we have our own reality and limitations," he said.

Lt Gen (ret) Mahbubur Rahman, member of BNP standing committee, said it would not be wise to send troops to Afghanistan without the cover of a UN peacekeeping mission.

"Earlier, we did not send troops to Iraq despite a request from the US. We [Bangladesh] have to consider our reality and also sensitivity of the issue before taking a decision," he added.

Mujahidul Islam Selim, general secretary of Communist Party of Bangladesh, termed America's request for troops "audacious". "It is entirely their [US] strategic matter and so there's no question of sending our troops there," he said.

"The US dares to make such request because of submissive policy taken by every government of our country," he observed.

It was America that helped the Pakistan forces by sending troops during the Liberation War in 1971, he said. "Ours is a peace-loving country and we must be aware of American conspiracy."

The government has to tell the US clearly that Dhaka is not sending any troops, he added.

Hasanul Haque Inu, president of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, said he thinks there is no reason for Bangladesh to deploy troops in Afghanistan whether Taliban warns or not.

"We don't accept American interferences in different countries in the name of War on Terror," he said.

Noted writer-journalist Shahriar Kabir told The Daily Star, "I don't consider the Taliban threat important, but in principle I think we should not send troops to Afghanistan."

The problems confronting Afghanistan should be solved by the democratic people of that country. Bangladesh should support the democratic and secular forces of that country. Sending troops and killing innocent people is not the solution, he noted.

The government should rather be sincere in efforts to

hunt down the Taliban agents in the country, he said.

Bangladesh saw a rise of militancy with the emergence of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) leader Siddiqul Islam alias Bangla Bhai in 2004.

It has so far banned four organisations for militant activities and an NGO for terror financing.

Though some militant outfits are still believed to be operative in the country, existence of Taliban has yet to be traced.

However, it was the Afghan war returnees who founded JMB and Harkatul Jihad al Islami (Huji). Among the local militant leaders, some had reportedly met Al-Qaeda boss Osama bin Laden and Taliban leader Mullah Omar several times.

Caretaker govt

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She reiterated that after the August 15, 1975 carnage, the military regime of General Ziaur Rahman had freed the collaborators under martial law proclamation and scrapped the entire process of trial.

About a demand of Bangladeshi expatriates in USA on resumption of Biman's Dhaka-New York direct flight she said it will resume by 2011 after adding new aircraft to the Biman fleet.

Asked about the government's plans to ban religion-based politics while the trial of war criminals is underway, she said the two are separate issues.

"Bangladesh is a secular country--the Election Commission has the sole power to decide which party will be competent to do the election politics," she said.

Earlier, Hasina spoke at a reception at the main building of Bangladesh permanent mission in New York, which she had opened on the same day last year.

The PM said the expatriate Bangladeshis are the true friends of the country. "We get your support to resolve all problems the country faces," she said.

She requested the expatriate Bangladeshis to invest in their homeland.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith, Planning Minister AK Khandaker, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni and Chief Whip Abdus Shaheed, among others, attended the reception.

Modasser

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He has recently said Bangladesh Chhatra League workers should be prioritised for employment at community clinics.

He said the concept of community clinics has emerged from the prime minister.

The health advisor was speaking as the chief guest at a three-day long discussion titled 'Primary Health Care Approach in Emergency', organised by the World Health Organisation at a local hotel in the capital.

Moreover, he urged the people to criticise and admire the government role saying, "All types of criticism are positive because the government is committed to people".

He also said media alerted the government many times of the future problems and resolved them through criticism.

The advisor said the skilled persons will be considered while implementing the prime minister's plan. Moreover, those who will serve sincerely, will be picked along with this parameter, he continued.

Women will be given priority for employment to community clinics as they are sincere in service. "They can serve pregnant mothers during emergency with skill," he said.

The Awami League government has set up 12,000 community clinics in 1996, but the next BNP government entirely stopped the process.

Probe team

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superiors about tree plundering even after newspapers reports in this regard. We will instruct local authorities to file criminal cases against tree plunderers," he said at the divisional forest office.

He added local forest officials could not identify beneficiaries of the Social Forestry Scheme on the chars as documents prepared at the beginning of the project in 2002-03 went missing.

Earlier in the morning, Faruque went to the chars and talked to some 15 people, of them only Mohammad Kalam and Felu Mollah were locals.

Kalam told him Saral, Yunus, Manzur and their men felled trees and sold those in presence of foresters. Very few of the trees were taken to forest office for auction, he added.

At this stage, Belal Hossain, one of Saral's men, shouted at Kalam and accused him of stealing trees.

Felu Mollah, on the other side, said he knew nothing about it.

Saral in his statement said, "Foresters took our help and we together protected the trees from erosion."

Asked whether he would talk to the local government, Faruque said, "No, the Union Parishad is not our beneficiary as the chars are government property."

Haripur UP Chairman Bazle Rizvi Al Hasan Munzil said, "We have documents of agreement with the forest department that we are beneficiaries of the scheme. They, however, did not give us any benefit or call us for investigation."

Earlier, the probe body on September 26 asked the Rajshahi divisional forest officer (DFO) to ensure presence of all beneficiaries during investigation.

"We informed as many as possible within the short time," said DFO Abul Bashar Miah.

Bashar investigated the matter earlier but found no involvement of foresters, though the trees were either stolen or denuded.

5-year plan

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plan would also determine about what the commission will have on offer for the countrymen after five years.

"It [strategic plan] will make us accountable to the people as they are able to know about the activities of the commission," mentioned the NHRC chief.

Replying to a query, Prof Mizan said the commission is still struggling with manpower shortages. "We were informed that the ministries concerned finalised the appointments of 28 staff few days back, but we don't know when we will get them in action."

He pointed out that the bureaucrats as well as all concerned will have to have a better understanding of the dignity of the commission as they very often fail to realise it.

The NHRC chief hoped violation of human rights will be a history in the country, once the commission is allowed to carry out its strategic plan during the next five years.

Padma bridge

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contract, Bangladesh needs the world's top contractors for the job" stated Ellen Goldstein, WB country director. "Government took a prudent decision to review qualifications in light of the changes in design. This decision favours high quality construction, and will not slow down technical preparations or financial approvals."

A WB official told The Daily Star that the government had selected pre-qualified contractors before completion of the detailed design. It might result in inviting fresh tender for selecting pre-qualified bidders in line with the detailed design.

The multipurpose bridge on the mighty river is a mega-project by any standards, the WB noted in its press release. Construction contract will be one of the biggest in the world -- involving more than \$1 billion for a single contract -- and will be technically demanding.

The WB said that before construction begins, further progress is needed on land acquisition, resettlement of affected population and development of construction yards essential for such a big project. The government is working with its partners to accelerate these preparatory activities. Co-financiers are making funds available in a record time keeping in view

the government's timetable for completion of the bridge by 2013.

The government and co-financiers agree that excessive haste runs a risk of poor construction at a higher cost, which doesn't serve the interest of the people of Bangladesh. Efficient construction with adequate quality control is essential for a bridge which Bangladesh can be proud of for generations to come, the press release said.

The WB will contribute \$1.2 billion for construction of the Bridge. In addition, the ADB will provide \$615 million, JICA \$300 million and Islamic Development Bank \$130 million.

Approval of financing from all co-financiers is expected before the end of this fiscal year, said the WB press release.

Kiwis arrive

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are scheduled for October 11, October 14 and October 17 respectively.

It will be the third visit for New Zealand to Bangladesh after 2004 and 2008.

SQUAD: Daniel Vettori (captain), Hamish Bennett, Grant Elliott, Brendon McCullum (wicketkeeper), Nathan McCullum, Andy McKay, Kyle Mills, Jesse Ryder, Aaron Redmond, Tim Southee, Shanan Stewart, Ross Taylor, Daryl Tuffey, BJ Watling, Kane Williamson.

Dhaka seeks

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Hasina praised the leadership of Ban Ki-moon for making the UN a functional institution to look after the world and the mankind.

She said that in many areas of the MDGs, Bangladesh has made remarkable achievements although the country got an award for reducing the child mortality rate.

Briefing reporters after the meeting PM's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad said the prime minister informed the UN secretary general that Bangladesh government is committed to its people to reach the target for all MDGs.

Hasina also said Bangladesh could have made good progress if the democratic process of the country had not been halted several times by autocratic governments.

She said after assuming the office her government has fixed the target to free the country from poverty, illiteracy and corruption, and also make it a middle-income country by 2021.

Hasina said the main enemy of the sub-continent is poverty and her government has been working tirelessly to get rid of this menace. "We're working hard to improve the fate of the country and its people."

The premier said her government has allocated Tk 700 crore from its own fund and

prepared 134 projects to face the adverse impacts of the climate change.

Ban Ki-moon thanked the prime minister for attending the UN General Assembly session and highly appreciated her strong commitment towards democracy, strong leadership and social uplift.

"You are the strongest champion among the champions," he told the prime minister for her achievements in different sectors, including the MDGs.

Ban Ki-moon also appreciated Bangladesh's capability of disaster management and praised Bangladesh for its contribution in the UN Peacekeeping Missions.

Currently, Bangladesh is the highest contributor of troops in the UN Peacekeeping Missions.

The UN secretary general expressed his high expectation that Bangladesh would get more awards in future like this year's MDG award for reducing child mortality rate.

He also praised the leadership role of Hasina during the COP-15. "I appreciate your sincerity to your people and the world mankind," Ban Ki-moon added.

Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, Ambassador at-large M Ziauddin and Principal Secretary MA Karim were, among others, present during the meeting.

Culture of secrecy

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culture of secrecy that developed for the years still impedes the RTI.

The speakers called for special attention to some loopholes in the act. They mentioned that the law does not yet cover local and multinational corporate houses directly while the list of security agencies exempted from the law is too long. Besides, the NGOs are still quite reluctant to disclose information about their work and funding process, they added.

Right to Information Forum, a platform of 80 organisations and individuals, organised the roundtable marking the International Right to Know Day 2010 in the capital's LGED auditorium.

The RTI act was promulgated in April last year. As per the act every citizen is entitled to seek and receive information held by public bodies.

So far there has not been much progress in engaging citizens in seeking information or creating public awareness about the law, the speakers observed.

They also criticised the recent remarks by prime minister's health adviser Syed Modasser Ali regarding the media's access to information.

They said it went against the election pledge of Awami League-led grand alliance government and the goals of the RTI act.

He suggested that deliberate denial is made subject to punishment. He also recommended a people friendly legal system, digital information system, removing inconsistencies and contradictions between RTI and other laws, capacity building of the officials and mass people.

Information Commissioner Prof Sadeka Halim stressed incorporating RTI Act in the constitution since the constitution amendment is under process.

The culture of secrecy among the civil servants is a barrier to implementing the act. Similarly people in Bangladesh are hesitant or rather afraid to seek information, said Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation and convener of RTI Forum.

GM Quader, minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism, said right to information is the foundation of democracy. However, it would take time to change the culture of secrecy in public service.

Referring to the comment by PM's health adviser, he said such culture has always been in the country but this was the first time someone said it publicly.

His comment has no association with the right to information. In fact, it is related to good governance, he added.

Lt Gen (ret) Mahbubur Rahman, standing committee member of Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Hafizuddin Khan, TIB chairman and a former adviser to the caretaker government, Mahbubul Alam, editor of the Daily Independent and former advisor to the caretaker government, among others, spoke at the roundtable.

New footage of Neil Armstrong's moon walk

AFP, Sydney

Long-lost footage of Neil Armstrong descending the ladder of the Apollo 11 lunar module will be screened in public for the first time in Sydney next week, a prominent astronomer told AFP.

The footage runs for a few minutes and is considered to be some of the best footage of the historic 1969 moonwalk, but the film was lost in archives for many years and was badly damaged when found, said John Sarkissian.

It depicts the first few minutes of Armstrong's descent which was recorded in Australia as NASA was still scrambling for a signal, showing a far clearer image than was initially screened worldwide.

Telescopes in remote Australia played a key role in the Apollo 11 mission, including provision of the television signal, after Armstrong decided to attempt the moonwalk early, putting the United States just beyond the horizon.

Sarkissian -- historian and astronomer in charge of the Australian side of the recordings restoration project -- said the unseen minutes were the "best quality of Armstrong descending the ladder."

"NASA was using the Goldstone (California) station signal, which had its settings wrong, but in the signals being received by the Australian stations you can actually see Armstrong."

Hasina

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surprise and asked the journalist where he got his information from. Puzzled, the journalist was seen looking for someone around him without replying to Hasina's question.

The prime minister then said the editor of Prothom Alo met her but there was no apologising. She said she knows nothing about this.

She went on to say that the investigation into the attack is going on. "After completion of the investigation, it will be learnt what actually happened," she said.

A delegation of Newspaper Owners Association of Bangladesh that included Matiur Rahman met Sheikh Hasina earlier.

HC summons

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regarding Sunday's HC order stating the effectiveness of an Election Commission (EC) gazette that declared the constituency vacant.

Sohul Hussein on Monday reportedly told the media that the EC had issued gazette notification cancelling Jatiya Sangsad membership of MK Alamgir in accordance with law and the EC will challenge the HC order with the appellate division.

The division bench of Justice AHM Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik and Justice Sheikh Md Zakir Hossain yesterday also issued a rule upon the election commissioner to explain within 10 days why contempt of court charges should not be brought against him and he should not be punished for making this comment.

During hearing the petition, Alamgir's lawyer Barrister Rokanuddin Mahmud told the court that Election Commissioner's comment is similar to violation of the HC order of stay, as the matter regarding MK Alamgir's parliamentary membership is now a sub-judice matter.

No extension

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Admitting the fact that every year the deadline is extended in defiance of law, he emphasised developing a culture of paying tax in time.

"The businessmen have demanded for extension but we have already announced earlier that it would not be done," he added.

Asked about the poor submission of income tax returns so far this year, NBR member Basir Uddin Ahmed said 70 percent returns are usually filed during the last week of the deadline.

NBR made such declarations over the years only to extend the timeframe on the last day of the deadline. Last year the time limit was deferred to November 12.

Different chamber bodies have already appealed for extension of deadline by at least one month, as many taxpayers could not prepare the return on time due to the Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr.

Pak Kashmiri militants 'hijacking' Kashmir talks

BBC ONLINE

The Kashmiri separatist Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) has criticised Pakistani militants for "hijacking" its cause.

The JKLF - which wants Kashmir to be independent of Pakistan and India - said that they were "subverting the indigenous movement".

Its strongest criticism was for the Jamaat-ud Dawa (JD) charity.

Experts say that the JKLF's latest criticism of Pakistani-based militant groups is more strident than usual.

The row comes at a sensitive time in Indian-administered Kashmir, where more than 100 people have died in street protests since June.

Nationalist struggle The JD charity is believed to be the parent organisation of the Lashkar-e-Taiba militant group.

Lashkar has been at the forefront of the armed insurgency in Indian-administered Kashmir in recent years and wants the territory to become part of Pakistan.

The JKLF statement was made as the JD launches a three-day mass contact drive across Pakistan-administered Kashmir to "raise awareness about the latest agitation in Indian-administered Kashmir".

The JKLF started the insurgency in Indian-administered Kashmir in the late 1980s.

Its leaders have since admitted they were then supported by the Pakistani government which trained their militant wing.

But the JKLF says that the Pakistanis changed their mind and introduced pro-Pakistan groups, such as Jamaat-e-Islami's affiliate, Hizbul Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Harkatul Mujahideen and other groups.

It says these groups not only fought Indians but also persecuted JKLF activists.

A JD spokesman, Yahya Mujahid, told the BBC on Monday that about 3,500 people have joined a JD caravan that will travel from Mirpur to Muzaffarabad in Pakistan-administered Kashmir and then hold a rally in Islamabad on Wednesday.

Witnesses and officials say local Kashmiri participants in the march are few - most are non-locals from different areas of Pakistan.

The JKLF has often accused pro-Pakistan groups of turning a legitimate nationalist

struggle of the Kashmiri people into an Islamic terrorist movement, thereby undermining the movement's credibility.

A JKLF statement says that the JD campaign "will sabotage the Kashmiris' spontaneous movement once again and provide propaganda material to the Indian government to defame and suppress the Kashmiri people's movement for national liberation."

S Korea urges China to press North on nuke arms

AFP, Seoul

A top South Korean diplomat urged China yesterday to press North Korea harder to give up its nuclear programme, saying Pyongyang should not be allowed to use the prospect of negotiations to buy time.

Vice Foreign Minister Chun Yung-Woo said there would be no progress in disarmament talks "as long as China takes a laid-back attitude about North Korea's denuclearisation".

"Six-party talks should not become a sanctuary for North Korea. It should not be allowed to use them to buy time to build up its nuclear capability," he told a security forum involving South Korean and Chinese experts.

The talks have been stalled since the last session in December 2008 and the North quit them in April 2009. China has been pushing for a resumption of the forum, which it hosts.

But South Korea and the United States have insisted they would not rush into resuming the six-nation dialogue which also includes Japan and Russia.

China, a key provider of food and energy aid to North Korea, is seen as reluctant to exercise its influence for fear of destabilising its impoverished neighbour.

Chun said that if Beijing places more importance on maintaining stability in Pyongyang, this would make denuclearisation more difficult and would in fact threaten the survival of the regime.

"If China firms up its position to put denuclearisation ahead of stability in the North and actively takes part in pressuring the North, there still remains the possibility of (achieving) denuclearisation," he said.

Maths teaching

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"The standard of mathematics up to secondary level is poor. Moreover, there's a shortage of teachers, a majority of whom aren't much qualified," Professor Tajul Islam, who headed the committee, told The Daily Star.

In addition, most mathematics teachers remain busy taking classes at coaching centres thus spending less time in classrooms, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid yesterday said after receiving the report.

The government formed the 10-member committee in August last year to prepare recommendations for improving the standard of mathematics in secondary level education.

After examining the curriculum up to secondary level, the committee observed that the current maths curriculum from class I to X, introduced in 1995, is outdated. It suggested formulation of a modern, more scientific and time-befitting curriculum.

To this end, it recommended increasing the number of teachers having BSC (Bachelor of Science) degree with maths as the minimum qualification of the teachers and reviewing the curriculum of different countries including UK, USA, India and Canada before formulating one for the country.

The faculty of logical thinking remains undeveloped among the children, as the teachers do not consider maths as logic, said Prof Tajul.

According to the report, generally one teacher takes maths classes from class VI to X in schools. The school authorities engage teachers

of other subjects for maths classes from class VI to VIII, as it is impossible for a single teacher to take all the classes.

The standard of mathematics in primary level is also far from encouraging, and average students of this level are weak in maths.

Elaborating the weaknesses of the existing curriculum, the report observes that number is very important in mathematics, but the abstract image of numbers has been presented in the textbook in such a complex way that the children find no relation with real life and lose interest in numbers.

Lack of continuity is another problem. For example, statistics has been introduced in class V but it discontinues in the next two classes and continues all over again from class VIII.

As for algebra, students start memorising formulas from class VII and VIII before learning its general concept.

"Students are compelled to memorise the algebraic formula, and most teachers think that formula is a thing to memorise, not to logically understand," said Prof Tajul Islam, also a member of the University Grants Commission.

Commenting on the report, education minister said the government will formulate a fresh mathematics syllabus in line with the recommendation of the committee in 2012.

Some other recommendations in the report include increasing trainings for the teachers, introducing creative questions in the mathematics from class VI and establishing a national academy on maths education for regular research.

Pabna DC, SP

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Our Pabna correspondent reports: police yesterday pressed charges against 33 activists of Awami League, Jubo League and Chhatra League in connection with the attack on government officials and foiling a recruitment test in Pabna.

Investigation officer (IO) of the two cases filed in this connection submitted charge sheet against the accused to the Speedy Trial Tribunal in the morning.

In the charge sheet, IO Md Anwar Hossain, sub-inspector of Sadar Police Station, brought charges of vandalising, forcibly halting the examination and intercepting government actions against the attackers.

The IO said, "The accused beat up teachers and examinees of two examination centres and snatched admit cards, answer papers, question papers and application forms. They also assaulted complainants magistrate Sarwar Alam, additional deputy commissioner (revenue), additional district magistrate, upazila nirbahi officer (Sadar) and other officers when they tried to calm the situation."

The attackers damaged four government vehicles parked outside the exam centres. At one stage, they broke window panes of the centres and burnt the snatched question papers, admit cards and answer papers, added the IO.

Police produced 25 accused, who are now in custody, before the tribunal yesterday. Judge Parvez Shahriar of the tribunal rejected their bail petitions. The other eight of the 33 accused are still at large.

The accused in the charge sheet are Jubo League district unit organising Secretary Zahir Hossain Rubel, relief affairs secretary Sajal, cultural affair secretary Tarikul Islam Rhythan, Abdul Mojib, Rejaul Karim Reza, Abdul Mannan Sardar, Haroon, Lahu, Arif, and Babu, and Pabna municipality AL's executive member Sapan Rahman, BCL district

unit president Ahmed Sharif Dablu, its former president Mostafizur Rahman Sweet, Sadar Upazila BCL unit president Suman and its general secretary Imran, Pabna Jubo League BCL unit general secretary Mamun and its former president Nazmul Hassan Pial, former president of the college unit Mamun Hyder Rony, former vice-president of Chhatra Sangsad of the college Santosh Hawlader and BCL activists Imran and Sabur, Sheikh Sujon, Sarwar