

Japan PM faces pressure over local poll results

AFP, Tokyo

Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan faced renewed pressure yesterday over his ruling party's poor showing in local elections and fresh criticism over his handling of the country's nuclear crisis. A candidate for the opposition Liberal Democratic Party won Sunday's lower house by-election in central Aichi prefecture, beating four rivals after Kan's Democratic Party of Japan failed to even contest the seat, media reported. Candidates backed by the DPJ also broadly lost ground in the second round of local elections held Sunday, following the party's defeat in gubernatorial and prefectural assembly polls earlier this month.

Wasa awarded

FROM PAGE 20

and operational cost and review earning. Former secretary general of United Nations Kofi Annan, who delivered speech as the main spokesman in the summit, handed over the award to the managing director of Wasa, said a press release. Though the Wasa got the award, the residents at different parts of the city have to enjoy stinky water.

Taqsem A Khan, the MD of Wasa, said though they were still under huge challenges of supplying pure drinking water, they got the recognition for reducing five percent system loss from 34 to 29 percent, increased 20 percent revenue income and reduced operational cost. Around 500 delegates from different countries including Dhaka Wasa took part in the summit held from April 18 to 19 in Berlin.

Among the seven pre-qualifying presentations from seven water utility bodies of the world, Dhaka Wasa has been voted as one of the best presentations at the performance challenge part, the release said. The seven cities that took part in the competition are Kansas and Gilber of Arizona of USA, Gdansk of Poland, Bucharest of Rumania, Algiers of Algeria, Brasilia of Brazil and Dhaka of Bangladesh.

Huji hideout

FROM PAGE 1

Three teams of Rab-10, including members of its bomb disposal unit, jointly raided the house around 2:00am yesterday and captured the Huji men. The law enforcers also recovered some compact disks (CDs), a bomb-making manual and organisational books of the outfit. Huji has been trying to reorganise recently, claimed Commander M Sohal, director of Legal and Media Wing of Rab.

"Huji members were visiting different madrasas to recruit members and impart training to them. Analysis of such activities suggests they were planning to carry out subversive activities," he told The Daily Star. An Afghan war veteran Sabbir was the founding organising secretary of Huji and later acted as commander of its northern unit.

Hailing from Bogra, he used to reside in Rajshahi and run a women's madrasa there. He absconded from Rajshahi after the present government took over and launched a combing operation against militants, mentioned the Rab official. The militant took training on arms and explosives at camps in Ukhia under Cox's Bazar to join Iraq war in 1988, but Indian police arrested him for trespassing.

Later in 1993, he returned home and started training the new recruits of Huji. On December 14 last year Rab busted a Huji den at Rajuan of Chittagong and arrested four military trainers. Sabbir was present there and managed to escape arrest.

According to confessions made by already arrested Huji leaders, the militants are responsible for more than 20 deadly bomb and grenade attacks since 1999 that killed over 100 people.

Fresh survey

FROM PAGE 20

down their concerns about foreshores. Records show the Gazipur DC ignored the BIWTA correspondences expressing concerns that excluding foreshores will shrink the rivers permanently. The shipping ministry has convened a meeting of the DCs of Dhaka, Narayanganj, Gazipur and Munshiganj today to discuss ways to save foreshores.

The DCs admitted to leasing out the foreshores over the years although existing laws term those "integral to rivers". It will require acquisition to regain the leased out land, said Delwar Hossain, additional deputy commissioner (revenue) of Gazipur.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela), an active party to the battle for river conservation, said the DCs have no authority to lease out foreshore lands as per the Land Management Manual. "Therefore, the question of land acquisition does not arise," she said, adding that the DCs have to free the foreshores from any occupancy and conserve those.

She added that they will soon appeal to the High Court seeking directions on the DCs for a list of the land leased out and another as per the CS record. A 2009 HC judgement holds that a river primarily includes bed, foreshore and bank. But the DCs gave no heed to the verdict while demarcating the Buriganga, Shitalakkhya, Turag, Balu and Dhaleswari.

Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan launched the setting up of boundary pillars along the Turag on April 12.

Narayanganj DC M Shamsur Rahman said as per the RS records, kilometer after kilometer of Khas lands are under private ownership. "We've to accept the reality," said Rahman hinting that foreshores under private ownerships are irrevocable. His administration has already set up the boundary pillars well into the foreshores of the Shitalakkhya.

When pointed out to the 2009 HC judgement, he said: "I've to see what the court orders." Munshiganj DC Azizul Alam says he is unsure whether the foreshores of the Dhaleswari at Munshiganj and Mirkadim river ports

Shady business

FROM PAGE 20

He also said the rice of food department cannot be stored in any private warehouse. Nobody can either sale or store the rice, he added. Rajib Kumar Dey, inspector of food, Pahartali, who was also present at the spot said if the owners can show proper documents that they have bought the rice of food for work programme then they will be relieved. In Bogra, Rab seized 1,250 bags of rice meant for OMS and VGD from a warehouse of a rice mill at Peergachha under Gabtoli upazila.

A mobile court also jailed Emran Hossain Nahid, 26, son of the mill owner Abdul Khaleq, on charge of assisting in illegal hoarding and sale of rice outside of the public food distribution system. Nahid's father Khaleq and maternal uncle Jalaluddin Akhand escaped the scene sensing the raid, said Rab-12 commander Major Mostafa Asad Iqbal who led the team that raided the warehouse around 2:30am and seized 71 metric tonnes of government rice imported from Vietnam.

Gabtoli upazila food officer Mizanur Rahman filed a case with Gabtoli Police Station against Khaleq and Akhand under special powers act. Nahid, however, claimed during primary interrogation that his maternal uncle Akhand used to keep the rice in their warehouse and denied his and his father's involvement in it. Mizanur Rahman said the accused accumulated the rice worth Tk 17 lakh from various areas of the district for illegal sale in the market.

have been earmarked. WASTE OF PUBLIC MONEY Of the total 800 pillars required for the 18-kilometre stretch of the Turag and the Balu in Gazipur, the Public Works Department (PWD) has set up 310 so far.

PWD Executive Engineer Bahauddin, who is responsible for the job, said the RCC pillars that have been set up will be of no use if the boundary line shifts to include the foreshores. It will mean a waste of nearly Tk 90 lakh from public fund. The district has a Tk 1.4-crore budget for the project.

The Narayanganj district administration has set up around 100 pillars of the 10,000 required under a Tk 10-crore project along 126-kilometre (both banks) stretch of the Shitalakkhya.

The Munshiganj district administration has set up 85 pillars of the 604 required under a Tk 1.17-crore project.

Over 200

FROM PAGE 1

"People know my family well. I was voted a lawmaker six times while my father three times," he said.

Khagrachhari BNP leader Abdul Wadud said the inclusion of his name among the ones involved is politically motivated. He added "I made lots of contributions to mosques and temples of Hindus and other tribal communities in my area, which testify to the fact that I did not oppress them."

VP Joynal and Nadim Mostafa, however, could not be reached over the phone for their statements. A high official of the home ministry said the commission identified most of the rape victims on the basis of newspaper reports of that time.

Many victims and their family members across the country contacted the commission when it was conducting the probe.

Rapists in 22 incidents of the 200 grabbed the victims' residences, he added. Fearing social stigma, majority of the victims had not done any forensic test following the incidents. "Many victims described their horrific experiences before the commission but denied lodging complaints against the rapists."

The victims think putting their names on record as rape victims will worsen their life in society, said the official. The probe commission found that most of the gang rapes occurred on the country's southern part -- Bhola, Barisal, Agoiljhara and Gournadi.

The accused were acquitted for lack of witnesses. In some cases, police gave final reports while the names of the accused were dropped in over 500 cases out of the 3,625 major crime incidents. As for the cases running at present, it was found that police were compelled to drop the names of the perpetrators as they have good connection with ruling AL men.

The commission recommended that the government should form district committees comprised of a magistrate, public prosecutor and some others of the district authorities to carry out further investigation into the incidents.

It, however, apprehended that it would be tough or, to some extent, impossible to continue the probe into the rape allegations, as the victims themselves are unwilling to do the legal battle. In case of arson attacks, investigators will hardly get any evidence. The victims of the attacks over the last few years built new structures in place of the damaged ones.

The judicial commission has made a report of the 2001 post-polls violence mentioning over 3,625 incidents of major crimes including killing, rape, arson and looting by cadres of the then ruling BNP-Jamaat alliance.

Of the incidents, the commission described 355 as politically motivated murders while 3,270 were incidents of rape, arson, looting and other atrocities.

Member secretary of the commission Monwar Hossain, deputy secretary of the home ministry, handed over the report to Home Minister Sahara Khatun on Sunday.

Cops get 24

FROM PAGE 20

Rajapur Police Station must register case within 48 hours of receiving the court order.

Earlier on Sunday afternoon, the court passed an order directing the officer-in-charge of Jhalakathi Police Station to record a regular case against the Rab personnel, lodged by Henoara Begum for maiming her son, within 24 hours of receiving the court's order and to immediately inform the court.

The court order has been sent to Rajapur Police Station by special messenger and reached there on Sunday night, a bench assistant of the court confirmed.

Habibur Rahman, Jhalakathi district additional police superintendent, said police will comply with the court order.

Abdul Halim, second officer of Rajapur police station, said court order reached them at 9:00pm Sunday night and police are trying to contact with the complainant of the case to register a case within 9:00pm tonight.

Govt okays

FROM PAGE 20

after the meeting, Prime Minister's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad said 87 percent of the country's power generation is based on gas. Considering coal as a cheaper alternative to gas or oil for power generation, the cabinet gave the approval. It will, however, take some time to generate power from coal, Azad added.

On Sunday, Taufiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, prime minister's energy adviser, told a private television channel that the government aims to set up coal-based power plants of total 5,000 MW capacity.

"Bidding process for coal-based plants is almost complete. We are also going to finalise a coal policy. More discussion is required for that," he said.

Total investment in power sector-- public and private-- would be nearly \$4 billion, of which foreign investment accounts for \$2-2.5 billion, said the energy adviser.

He said the government is trying to discover new gas fields and gave an assurance that business infrastructures will get gas connection by the end of this year.

Some 12 power plants of total 1,400 MW capacity have already started operating and 2,000 MW electricity will be added to the national grid this year.

"There will be no electricity shortage by the end of the year," he said at a live talk show aired on ntv.

Fatwa doesn't

FROM PAGE 20

As per the constitution, everybody has the right to give fatwa as an opinion, but cannot instigate others to commit a criminal offence, Rafique-ul Huq told the court.

Nobody can punish anyone in the name of fatwa and any aggrieved person can move to the court against the instigators, he added.

He also observed the HC verdict imposing a complete ban on fatwa is not right. M Zahir opined anybody can give fatwa as advice but must not interfere into other's rights. He apprehended social problems if the SC makes fatwa permissible.

If the SC declares fatwa illegal as a whole, it will be an injustice, mentioned TH Khan adding, it could lead to a movement in the society.

The court should be confined within the facts of the case, rather than giving any venture opinion on this issue, added the legal expert. On January 1, 2001, the HC declared illegal all punishments imposed in the name of fatwa after a hearing on its own suo moto ruling. The court issued the ruling following a newspaper report on hilla marriage (marriage with a third person).

Two maulanas -- Mufti Mohammad Toyeeb and Abul Kalam Azad -- challenged the verdict at the SC in the same year.

The apex court started hearing the appeal on March 1 this year.

Grameen gets clean

FROM PAGE 1

going beyond its mandate under the 1983 Grameen Bank Ordinance.

The terms of reference empowered the committee to review the involvement of Grameen Bank with its other organisations, and probe if there is any irregularity in operations and involvement of its financial or executive chiefs in such activities, and make recommendations. Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, founder of Grameen Bank, has been working as chairman and Grameen officials are working as directors for many of these organisations, officials said quoting the report. The committee questioned the legality of such activities.

It recommended that Grameen Bank should get the ownership of Grameen Telecom, which holds a 34 percent stake in the country's largest mobile operator Grameenphone, so that Grameen Bank "members" benefit directly from it.

The market value of the Grameenphone shares, held by Grameen Telecom, is more than Tk 7,000 crore, but Grameen Bank currently does not have any stake in Grameen Telecom, said the officials.

The committee made a series of recommendations that include raising the retirement age of the Grameen Bank managing director to 65 years from 60 and bringing Grameen Bank under the jurisdiction of Microcredit Regulatory Authority (MRA).

Bangladesh Bank last month relieved Yunus, 71, of his duties as the Grameen Bank's managing director on grounds of violation of the retirement rule that mandates the bank officials to step down at the age of 60.

The committee suggested that MRA, not the central bank, should have the authority to approve the appointment of the MD.

It also suggested a major change in governance saying the number of borrower directors in the Grameen board should be reduced to six from nine. Three vacant posts of director should be filled by persons with expertise in rural economy, the committee said.

Committee members Nazrul Huda, deputy governor of Bangladesh Bank; RM Devnath, former teacher at Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management; Mohsin Rashid, a lawyer at the Supreme Court; Rokeya Deen, former deputy comptroller and auditor general; and Shaful Islam Patwari, Banking Division secretary were present during the submission of the report to the finance minister.

Muhiut told reporters that the committee was given responsibility to make recommendations on four issues.

On transfer of the Norwegian government fund, the committee said it did not find any irregularity in the handling of the fund and the matter has been settled, the

finance ministers said. Referring to the interest rate charged by Grameen Bank, the committee said among all microcredit lenders in the country Grameen Bank offers the lowest interest rate, Muhiut said.

Committee Chief Prof Monaw-war Uddin told journalists: "We have made recommendations on many issues. The government may take steps on issues relating to Grameen Bank on the basis of these recommendations."

He said the committee also mentioned several alternative measures. "Grameen Bank runs activities centring microcredit and social business on a large scale. The government has to decide on how these can be brought under a single framework through reform and how it should be done," Monaw-war Uddin said.

"It is up to the government whether it will accept the findings of the report completely or partially," he said. Grameen Bank received some grants in the 80s and 90s from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). Norwegian state television aired a documentary that said Grameen Bank transferred a part of the grant to one of its subsidiaries. Various reports on the issue were published by the media at home and abroad last year.

In Bangladesh, online news agency bdnews24.com was the first to report on the issue that set off a raft of criticisms against Grameen Bank in a section of the media.

The officials said the committee has examined the matter extensively and found that it had already been settled by the Norway government and Grameen Bank.

Transfer of Grameen Bank's funds to another organisation is out of Grameen Bank's jurisdiction, but the organisation to which the fund was transferred is a welfare-oriented one and also run by Grameen workers.

The committee thinks the fund had not been used for any dishonest purpose. It reviewed the interest rates of 10 leading microfinance institutions in the country and found Grameen Bank's effective interest rate at 20 percent on loans was the lowest. The government has set the microcredit interest rate at a maximum of 27 percent.

It found that Grameen's total rate of interest stands at about 27 percent if credit insurance, mandatory savings and other charges are taken into account, while other microlenders charge more than 30 percent. Grameen Bank charges a simple interest rate on its borrowers.

The Grameen Bank Ordinance has empowered the board of directors of the bank to make regulations. But the review committee recommended that the 1983 ordinance should be amended to make it mandatory to take

prior approval from the government before making any regulation.

It also recommended the government should amend the ordinance in such a way that associated companies are set up in the spirits of Grameen Bank.

Grameen Fund and Grameen Kalyan should be dissolved and could be incorporated into Grameen Bank as its departments, according to the committee. If dissolved, all of their activities and asset liabilities will be part of Grameen Bank, and their accountability will be ensured, the committee said. They are also part of Grameen's 48 associated companies.

The number of associated companies of Grameen could be reduced through merger or amalgamation, and their governing body be independently restructured, said the committee.

GRAMEEN BANK'S REACTION Grameen Bank has expressed satisfaction over the review committee's report and said it came to know about the submission of the report to the finance minister through the online reports of some dailies.

In a statement, Grameen Bank General Manager (information and media coordination) Jannat-E-Quanine said all workers, members, borrowers and well-wishers of Grameen Bank felt relieved and happy that the truth came out through the report.

Grameen Bank will be in a position to issue a statement on other matters in the report when it receives a copy of it, she said.

Anxious wait

FROM PAGE 20

Africans are the majority of occupants in the camp. The IOM is unable to charter flights exclusively for Bangladeshis due to fund constraint, an IOM spokesman in Dhaka told The Daily Star yesterday.

The process of repatriation will be expedited with the signing of a tripartite agreement between the Bangladesh government, World Bank (WB) and IOM, under which WB will give loan to Bangladesh to repatriate its nationals.

The IOM will be able to charter flights as soon as the loan is disbursed, added the spokesman. A total of 131 flights have operated since the beginning of repatriation, of which 113 flights were chartered by IOM on a cost-sharing basis with the Bangladesh government.

Six Bangladeshi students are taking part in the ongoing Higher Secondary Certificate Examinations under the supervision of Bangladesh mission in Tripoli.

Talks invitation

FROM PAGE 1

in the letter prompted the special committee to react sharply. "The language she used in the letter is discourteous and out of parliamentary norms," Suranjit Sengupta, co-chair of the special committee, said in a briefing at the parliament media centre.

Citing Sunday's talks with eminent jurists, committee member Tofail Ahmed said the country's top jurists welcomed the move to hold talks and took part in the discussions.

"But it is very unfortunate that the leader of the opposition, who is a part of the parliament, found conspiracy in the committee's move," Tofail added.

Speaking at the same press briefing, Barrister Anisul Islam Mahmud, a member of the committee, said the objective of the formation of the committee is to bring changes to the constitution through a consensus.

The special committee's members said Khaleda's refusal to join the talks has frustrated the people who have been eagerly waiting to see a positive change in the country's political culture.

They however expressed their expectation that Khaleda will understand her "wrong" position and join the talks. The committee will sit with her anytime she wants, they said.

Later in the day, BNP at a press briefing at the party's central office explained why Khaleda boycotted the talks. "We will see if there is any need to express our opinions, once the bill to amend the constitution is placed," Moudud Ahmed, a member of BNP national committee, told the briefing.

He also demanded that the government suspends and withdraws the copies of the constitution reprinted after the Supreme Court had scrapped the fifth amendment.

The committee will sit tomorrow with ruling Awami League Chief also Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The special committee yesterday at a meeting deferred the talks with Hasina by a day which had earlier been scheduled for today.

Bangladesh Jatiya Party did not join the dialogue. KHALEDA'S FOUR REASONS In response to the invitation sent to her by the special committee's chief on April 20, the BNP chief sent the letter on Sunday night citing four reasons for boycotting the talks.

Khaleda said the letter sent by the committee chief to her neither specified any proposal nor had, as an attachment, the copy of the constitution reprinted on February 10, 2011.

The law ministry reprinted the constitution following the Supreme Court's verdict scrapping the fifth amendment.

The BNP chief said the constitution was reprinted bypassing the parliament and violating article 142 of the constitution. The law minister said the reprinted constitution is the country's charter now, while the special committee's co-chair said it is a draft on the basis of which the committee is working, Khaleda noted.

"The government has created confusion among the people by these remarks. The people don't know anything about the government's stance on the constitution amendment," Khaleda said in her letter.

However, Liberal Democratic Party and

11 killed

FROM PAGE 1

identified as Jasim Uddin, 28, a returnee from Dubai, and son of Abul Khayer of Goalia Palong Nayapara village in Ramu upazila. Police arrested one of the robbers, Abul Kashem, at Goalia on the boundary of Ukhia and Ramu upazilas. He hails from Banshkhalia upazila of Chittagong.

Earlier, on information from locals, a squad of Ukhia police led by Officer-in-Charge Niaz Mohammad had rushed to Ratnapaloni village. Sensing police presence, the robbers opened fire on them triggering a gunfight.

Four cops, Jasim Uddin and 16 other villagers were hit by bullets. Jashim died on way to local upazila health complex. The SP along with Ukhia and Ramu police cordoned Goalia area at about 5:30am. The gang members again traded fire with the law enforcers.

Police later found the bodies of six robbers in a bush. About 200 shots were fired during the gunfight with the gang, police said.

Search for the other robbers continued for hours. Police recovered a locally-made rifle and six bullets. At about 2:00pm, the villagers caught four robbers when they were trying to escape to hilly areas. They were beaten to death.

Of the four bullet-hit policemen, Sub-Inspector Gobinda Das and constable Rasheedul Islam were admitted to Ukhia upazila health cComplex. Two others -- Morshed and Tutul -- were shifted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital as their condition deteriorated. They suffered head injuries.

The others with bullet injuries were admitted to the upazila health complex, Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital and clinics.

2 factories

FROM PAGE 20

Bhagirothpur area in Narsingdi. The team, led by Munir Choudhury, director (Monitoring & Enforcement), also served show cause notice on four other factories for the same reason in the Sadar upazila.

The team conducted the drive and found the factories guilty and fined Tk 25.80 lakh to Unilon Textiles Ltd and Tk 9.95 lakh to HM Textile Ltd for not setting up effluent treatment plants (ETP).

The court also served show cause notice on KT Dyeing and Finishing Mill, Bright Textile Industries, Micro Trade and Index Plaza to set up ETPs.

Insanar Ma

FROM PAGE 20

a time when a Samaritan from Dhaka offered to pay the expenses for accommodation in an old home after reading her story in The Daily Star on Sunday.

Of the well-wishers, Nargis Rahman, a housewife from Dhaka, offered to accommodate Insanar Ma in an old home, while Farzana Hossain from Intertek Bangladesh also contacted her with similar help.

"I will never leave the place where my husband died," a determined Insanar Ma told them in response. Contacted, her stepson Shukkur Ali said he could not afford to look after his stepmother since he is only a day labourer with a meagre income.

"Though I like my stepmother very much, I am unable to help her as I have to maintain an eight-member family with my little income," he said.

Though several well-wishers contacted Insanar Ma after learning her story, no public representatives or Social Service Department officials approached her.

Insanar Ma has been fighting for her old-age allowance for more than 16 years. With no husband or children, she lives alone in a makeshift hut at Balali village in Madan upazila and lives on begging.

Like any other day, she was again spotted on the village street last evening, begging.