

Filling station

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If the government does not meet the major demands of the owners before May 22, they will enforce the strike, said Nazmul Haque, president of Bangladesh Petrol Pump Owners' Association, at a press briefing at a city hotel.

However, the CNG (Compressed Natural Gas) refuelling stations will remain open during the strike although the petrol pump proprietors also own these stations, he added.

One of their major demands is implementation of the government's decision about increasing the pump owners' commission on sales of petroleum product.

After a long negotiation, the government on February 23 agreed to raise the commission, but is yet to implement the decision.

A special committee formed by the government recommended increasing the sales commission of diesel and kerosene by 3.4 percent and octane and petrol by four percent.

Currently, the owners earn 2.4 percent commission for selling diesel and kerosene and 2.7 percent for octane and petrol, mentioned Haque.

Around 4,900 petrol pumps have been operating across the country.

Earlier, the owners observed a six-hour country-wide strike on May 9 last year for realising their demands, but it was called off on government's assurance.

According to the owners' leader, they are negotiating with the government for framing a policy to set up petrol pumps. Due to lack of a policy, the authorities are allowing installation of petrol pumps almost anywhere in the country.

The owners and workers are also fighting to establish a separate tank lorry terminal in the country.

Gates to help

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Sheikh Hasina at her hotel suite in the Swiss city on Monday evening, PM's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad said.

During the discussion, the Microsoft chairman hoped that Hasina's modern and prudent leadership would take the country into a new height of development.

He further appreciated the present government's development programmes in the field of women empowerment, agriculture and health sector.

The prime minister and the Microsoft chairman also discussed scope of cooperation in vaccination programmes.

Thanking Bill Gates for his commitment and efforts towards people's development, the PM said her government is highly committed to ensure women's empowerment in all spheres of the society to establish their rights.

Besides, the premier told Bill Gates her government's various programmes to reduce child and maternal mortality rate.

The Microsoft chairman congratulated Hasina for Bangladesh's achievement of MDG-4 award.

The PM also said her government is relentlessly working to achieve the other MDGs.

Health Minister AFM Ruhul Haque, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, State Minister for Forest and Environment Hasan Mahmud, among others, were present.

Meanwhile, Supachai Panitchpakdi, secretary general of Unctad, in a meeting invited the PM to attend the UN Conference on Trade and Development (Unctad) to be held in Doha next year.

In another meeting, UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibe appreciated the premier for Bangladesh's success in controlling the HIV/AIDS diseases.

Later, WHO Director Shekhar Saxena paid a courtesy call on the PM at her hotel in the evening.

During the meeting, Hasina informed the WHO director that her daughter Saima Wazed Hossain, a psychologist, is arranging a regional conference on autism next July.

Caretaker govt verdict

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"We've tried to categorically clear the legal position on this issue in details in our verdict. You can understand everything if you read the short order [of the verdict] properly," Justice Khairul told reporters earlier in the day on the Supreme Court premises.

The Appellate Division headed by ABM Khairul in its May 10 verdict declared that the present provision for the caretaker government system is unconstitutional and void. But the system may be practised for holding two more parliamentary elections on the age-old principles that "necessity makes it lawful, and safety of the people and safety of the state is the supreme law."

The verdict triggered widespread controversy as many jurists and politicians dubbed it self-contradictory and questioned how the next two parliamentary elections could be held under the "illegal" caretaker system. Many feared the verdict will deepen the political crisis over holding of the next parliamentary polls.

A source close to Justice Khairul, however, told The Daily Star that the Appellate Division in its full verdict is likely to explain in details how the parliament can legitimise the holding of the next two parliamentary elections under the now-void caretaker government system based on the above mentioned three maxims.

On condition of anonymity, the source said the Appellate Division used the three maxims in the short verdict to pave the way for keeping the "illegal" caretaker government system in place for two more national polls considering the current political situation.

He said the full verdict will leave the matter to the parliament to decide the matter.

Between the announcement of the verdict and his retirement yesterday afternoon, Justice Khairul Haque made some comments about the verdict before journalists.

"We've given this verdict considering all legal aspects, the country and its people and the existing situation," he said in response to a query whether the caretaker government system will remain in place following the Supreme Court verdict.

He, however, welcomed

the criticisms of the verdict on the 13th amendment through which the system was introduced in 1996, against the backdrop of agitation by Awami League.

The verdict also put the parliamentary special committee on constitutional amendment in a difficult situation. It now has to find ways for two more elections under the system.

The parliamentary special committee that sat on Monday said it is waiting for a copy of the full verdict to see if there is any suggestion on ways to continue with the caretaker system for two more parliamentary polls.

The verdict on the caretaker government, however, expected that the parliament would take steps to amend the provisions and exclude chief justices and other judges of the Appellate Division in leading the caretaker government.

According to the current provision, Justice Khairul Haque is supposed to be appointed as the chief adviser to the next caretaker government.

Justice Khairul, however, refused to make any specific comments on whether he would take the charge.

The main opposition BNP has said it will not take part in the next parliamentary election, to be held in early 2014, if it is not held under a caretaker government. Also, the party "will not accept" Khairul as the head of the caretaker government.

When journalists enquired about his position, Justice Khairul said, "None but Allah can say what will happen in future, and I always depend on Allah."

He said the law will take its own course.

"I was a lawyer. I became a judge of the High Court and then I became a chief justice. I've always tried to perform my duties properly."

He welcomed the criticism on the verdict. "There are criticisms on the verdict. Many people are now thinking about and discussing the verdict, which is reasonable and normal, although this trend was absent in the past," he said.

"Criticisms of verdicts will inspire judges to deliver good verdicts," he said.

Judges have to be independent mentally in order to make the judiciary independent, he said at a programme yesterday.

He said the judges should deliver verdicts with good sense in order to establish rights of litigants and justice.

The judges have to learn to say no to any offer, he said, adding that popular judges are bad and a good judge can never be popular to all.

He emphasised the need for increasing financial benefits of all judges and providing them with logistic and manpower support.

He made the remarks while speaking as chief guest at a seminar on "Budgetary Allocations for Law and Justice: Issues and Trends" organised by Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (BILIA) at Cirdap auditorium in the city.

Bangladeshi

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companies leasing farmland in Africa. The aim is to bring most of the farms' output back to Bangladesh to ease food shortages," he told AFP.

"African countries offer unique opportunities for farming investment," he said, adding "Companies from China and other countries are everywhere in Africa."

Abdul Matlub Ahmad, owner of Nitel Group, said his company signed a deal with the Ugandan government last month to lease farmland to grow rice.

"Under the deal, we can bring some 80 percent of our output back to the country after payment of some annual fees. We shall some employ 25,000 workers--some 90 percent from Uganda," he told AFP.

Matlub said the group and other Bangladeshi businessmen are looking for further land lease deals in Tanzania, Benin and Guinea.

"These governments are interested to strike agreements with us. I think it will open up vast new opportunities for Bangladeshi entrepreneurs," he added.

Since Bangladesh identified overseas farming as a key way of improving food security late last year, local businessmen have also scoured Africa for suitable land to lease, foreign ministry official Islam said.

Over the last few years, Bangladesh has become a major importer of rice and wheat, with grain imports up 86 percent year-on-year to \$882 million for the last seven months of 2010, according to the central bank.

Public transport

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"We can't solve the problem overnight, but we are trying to bring more buses [on city roads] to alleviate public sufferings," Communications Minister Syed Abul Hossain told The Daily Star.

Transport owners told a meeting at the communications ministry on Monday that the government has not formulated any policy for resolving the long-standing crisis in transport sector.

"You [the government] always ignored this sector, compelling 42 companies to wind up their business in the last five years," alleged Moshir Rahman Ranga, one of the owners.

Contacted, a number of transport sector leaders said no unified policy for mass transport could be formulated as those supposed to do so are directly or indirectly involved in it.

"Whenever a party comes to power, their men take control of the transport sector to make money through extortions and toll collection," said a communications ministry official, requesting anonymity.

Several agreements have been signed between the government and the transport owners, but none of those was implemented.

In 2005, the then BNP government decided not to allow small transports like minibus and human hauler in the capital, but the present government cancelled the decision in 2009.

Also, a decision to form a body of the transport owners to discipline the sector is yet to be implemented.

CHAOS CONTINUES Against the backdrop of chaos over transport fares, the government on Monday increased bus fare by around 30 percent and CNG fare by seven percent to be effective from May 19.

Leaders of transport owners' association on Monday agreed with the government that they would not charge increased fares until tomorrow when the new rates would come into force.

The communication minister even threatened to cancel the route permit of the busses that would charge extra money from the passengers. But visiting different city spots, no ministry supervision to implement the decision has been found.

Talking to The Daily Star, a number of passengers from different city routes said they have to pay hiked up fares even after the government decision.

A bus passenger said he has to pay Tk 28 instead of Tk 20 from Uttara house-building to Kakrail.

"We have no alternative but to pay hiked fares amid severe scarcity of transports in the city," said a passenger who regular travel from Mirpur to Motijheel.

The operators are realising extra money by putting the amount on the tickets.

Asked about violating the

government decision, President of Association of Bus Companies Khandaker Rafiqul Islam Kajol said, "We, from a meeting yesterday, asked all not to charge extra fare, but some operators might have not followed the instruction."

He said no decision will be implemented in transport sector until the government pay special attention to the sector.

Although the present Awami League government is importing buses to minimise the city's increasing transport woes, the private companies are withdrawing themselves from the business to make the problem more complicated.

Four separate committees formed by the communications ministry to identify problems in the transport sector and to suggest possible solutions are not at all functional.

Khandaker Enayet Hossain, secretary general of Dhaka Sarak and Paribahan Owners' Association, however, claimed that the transport business is in the dire strait due to continued losses in the business.

A ruling party influential, Enayet said increased prices of motor parts and traffic congestion in the city drastically cut their profit over the last few years. "The owners are scared of bringing new buses," he said, suggesting the government review transport fares every year.

Unite to fight diseases

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session of the World Health Assembly at the UN office here in the afternoon.

On her arrival at the Palais des Nations, she was received by the Director General of World Health Organization (WHO) Margaret Chan.

Speaking on the occasion, the PM also urged the international community to renew their commitment to ensure "Health for All".

"If health for all could be ensured, the world leaders will be able to promote human dignity and enhance quality of life for individuals," she added.

Hasina said healthcare is one of the most important prominent aspects of people's overall wellbeing and it can be attained only through collective actions.

Regarding Bangladesh's position in achieving MDG-6 target, the premier said her government is working for a greater regional collaboration to check water borne diseases like cholera, hepatitis A and E, typhoid, and paratyphoid.

She said her government has planned out universal health coverage for all citizens through consulting upper referral points using tele-connectivity, and updating local health data to the centralised online database.

The PM said essential healthcare will be reached to people's homes through community health centres that would provide childbirth services to reduce maternal and child mortality.

Laying emphasis on family planning, she said there is an urgent need for safe and effective family planning for about 215 million women of the world.

On her government's efforts to reduce total fertility rate and improving contraceptive acceptance rate, she expressed hope that the international community would continue their sup-

port to its effort to make population an asset instead of being a burden.

Hasina said most of policy targets of her government are also in tandem with the MDGs adopted by the United Nations Millennium Summit in its Declaration in 2000.

She said Bangladesh's achievement in reducing child mortality has been recognised by the United Nations Award on MDG-4 presented to her last year during the 65th United Nations General Assembly in New York.

The PM said "as regard to MDG-5 on maternal health, our success is on track and will be reached by 2015."

She said "the latest Maternal Mortality Survey Report 2010 indicates that our maternal mortality rate (MMR) dropped from 574 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 194 in 2010."

Hasina said her government has introduced a maternal health voucher scheme which covers 274,000 poor pregnant women every year.

In respect to MDG-6 on combating HIV/AIDS, the PM said "it has been possible to keep HIV/AIDS prevalence rate to less than 1% in Bangladesh due to the effective national programme aided by the country's strong inherent social values."

Regarding her government's efforts to provide services to the children suffering from autism and other developmental disabilities, the premier said she is going to organise a regional conference on Autism from 25 to 27 July this year in Dhaka.

Hasina hoped that the conference may also provide important input for the United Nations High Level Meeting on Non-Communicable diseases to be held in September 2011.

On climate change and increasing frequency of natural disasters, she called

for global recognition of this challenge, including its public health dimensions, to find innovative responses to it.

The PM appreciated the H4-1 Initiative by UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO, World Bank, and USAIDS that provides an institutional mechanism for enhanced support to countries in need including Bangladesh.

Hasina said since health is linked to other factors, the policies of Bangladesh government encompass poverty reduction, gender equality, women empowerment, education, maternal healthcare, child mortality, family planning, among others.

More bullets

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raid in the area around 6:30am.

They found two bags containing ammunition used in Chinese rifle under a culvert, said Md Tamiz Uddin, officer-in-charge of Jhenaigati Police Station.

Sherpur Superintendent of Police (SP) Md Anisur Rahman led the drive.

A general diary was lodged with the local police station while none was arrested in this connection.

Last on May 9, police seized 995 bullets from Bakakura village and arrested Ali Chura, 27, of the village and Ashraf Islam, 26, of neighbouring Dupuria in Jhenaigati upazila.

SP Anisur said the arrestees, while in remand, divulged important information during police interrogation and further investigation is going on. He, however, did not comment on the information recovered.

Earlier on December 18 last year, police recovered 13,680 bullets and, a week later, Border Guard Bangladesh personnel seized bullets, fuses used for detonating mines and a grenade from the same village.

No Bangladesh if we had nuke

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prevented war with historic rival India, which he accused of pursuing a "massive program" due to ambitions of superpower status.

Khan also argued that Bangladesh would not have won independence in 1971 if Pakistan had nuclear weapons. India supported Bangladesh's independence, which came after a nine-month struggle that was harshly put down by Pakistani forces.

"Don't overlook the fact that no nuclear-capable country has been subjected to aggression or occupied, or had its borders redrawn. Had Iraq and Libya been nuclear powers, they wouldn't have been destroyed in the way we have seen recently," Khan said.

Many Pakistanis regard Khan as a hero for building the Islamic world's first nuclear bomb. India and Pakistan carried out nuclear tests in 1998.

He admitted in 2004 that he ran a nuclear black-market selling secrets to Iran, Libya and North Korea.

But Khan later retracted his remarks and in 2009 was freed from house arrest, although he was asked to keep a low profile.

Pakistan has been increasingly worried about its nuclear program after US forces on May 2 managed to enter the country covertly to kill the world's most wanted man, Osama bin Laden, who was living in the garrison city of Abbottabad.

Khan lashed out at Pakistanis who contend that the country, which suffers grinding poverty and receives billions of dollars in US assistance each year, cannot afford its nuclear program.

"The propaganda about spending exorbitant sums on the nuclear program circulated by ignorant, often foreign-paid, Pakistanis has no substance," he wrote.

But Khan also said that Pakistan's "incompetent and ignorant rulers" never devoted enough resources to development, which he argued should have been easier due to the protection ensure by nuclear weapons.

Pakistan said that Senator John Kerry, on a mission to Islamabad to ease tensions in the wake of bin Laden's killing, assured Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani that the United States had no designs on taking over the country's nuclear arsenal.

"He said that he can write this with his blood, that we have no interest in Pakistan's nuclear assets," Gilani's office said in a statement.

But the statement quoted Kerry as hoping that Pakistan's nuclear weapons would be "well-protected and secure" under a "proper command and control system."

Bhutan wants

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the Saidpur airport tomorrow, Tourism and Civil Aviation Minister GM Quader told the BBC Bangla Service in an interview yesterday.

The BBC Bangla Service also talked to Quader about how Bhutan would like to use the Saidpur airport and how much Bangladesh would benefit from it.

Nato strikes Pak army post

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"The troops at the post fired upon the helicopters and, as a result of exchange of fire, two of our soldiers received injuries."

Washington considers the tribal belt a hotbed of al-Qaeda, where Taliban and other militants plot attacks on US troops in Afghanistan and on Western targets.

"Two Nato helicopters committed the airspace violation and shelled an army checkpoint, injuring two soldiers," a senior local security official told AFP.

It comes after the United States launched a raid from Afghanistan on May 2 that killed al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden near Islamabad, in an attack that embarrassed and angered the Pakistani military and leadership.

It also comes just a day after US Senator John Kerry tried to repair relations with close ally Pakistan over bin Laden.

The western military official in Kabul, who requested not to be named, told AFP that the two heli-

copters were in Afghanistan "in support of a forward operating base which was receiving fire from across the border of Pakistan".

"Upon arrival at the scene, one of the helicopters received fire from across the border but didn't immediately return fire. Upon receiving fire a second time, the helicopter returned fire," he added.

"Later, ISAF (the US-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan) was notified (by Pakistani authorities) that two soldiers have been wounded," he said.

A spokesman for the international military alliance in Afghanistan said ISAF "had reports of a possible incident. We are looking into it".

"I can't confirm any of the details," Lieutenant-Colonel John L. Dorrian said.

The Pakistani military often accuses the Nato force in Afghanistan of violating Pakistan's air space in the hunt for Taliban who launch attacks before fleeing back

across the border into Pakistan.

Pakistan temporarily shut the main land route for Nato supplies into Afghanistan last September after officials accused Nato of killing Pakistani troops in another cross-border attack.

The northwest region is being targeted by a record number of US drone strikes, the number of which has doubled in the last year, with more than 100 strikes killing over 670 people, according to an AFP tally.

The CIA says the covert programme has severely disrupted al-Qaeda's leadership.

US drone strikes inflame anti-American feeling in Pakistan, which has worsened since a CIA contractor shot dead two Pakistani men in a busy Lahore street in January.

Two US drone strikes targeting a militant compound and a vehicle in North Waziristan on Monday killed at least nine people.

Khaleda

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meeting with Khaleda Zia at the House of Commons wanted to know about functioning of democracy, socio-economic and political and human rights situation in Bangladesh.

Khaleda apprised Miliband about the prevailing scenario in the country including the government's undemocratic activities and repression on its political opponents, Khaleda Zia's ex-assistant Press Secretary Mushfiqul Fazal Ansari who was present at the meeting, told UNB over phone.

Prof Muhammad Yunus issue and extrajudicial killing were discussed during the meeting that lasted about an hour from 1:30 pm.

Miliband also expressed concern over removal of Prof Yunus from Grameen Bank.

The two leaders recalled the good relations between the two governments while both were in power.

Later, Khaleda Zia, also leader of the opposition in parliament, met former British PM Gordon Brown at the House of Commons.

Brown appreciated various achievements particularly in women empowerment, female education and reduction maternal and child mortality under the leadership of Khaleda Zia during the last BNP-led alliance government.

Khaleda also met the Chairman of Britain-Bangladesh All Party Parliamentary Group Anne Main.

BNP leaders Shamser Mobin Chowdhury, Osman Faruk and Sabihuddin Ahmed, among others, were present.

CNG cylinder

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The other victim is a passerby.

Witnesses said the explosion occurred when the Kanungopara-bound local bus was being refueled at HN CNG Station around 10:00am.

There was no passenger on the bus at the time of the accident.

A flying portion of the cylinder hit Nasir's car waiting just beside the bus for refueling, smashing its front part.

Babul, the passerby, of Sadhinagar under Rangunia upazila in Chittagong was wounded when another portion of the cylinder struck him.

They were rushed to Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

Mostak Ahmed Chowdhury, sub-inspector of Chandgaon Police Station, said they sealed the station following the blast.

Man carries

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fetus entered his body due to developmental anomaly in his mother's womb.

"There was a monozygotic twin at the mother's womb. During the development process, one embryo somehow went inside the other and could not develop. That is why Malek is now carrying that embryo," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

They will fix the date of operation today.

Malek's case is not the first of its kind at BSMMU. In 2005, Prof MA Majid conducted a similar surgery on a 16-year-old boy from Bhola who was carrying a fetus.

According to experts, 90 such cases have been found across the world.

Malek's brother Belal Hossain said they took him to Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College in Bogra, their hometown, early this month following his repeated complaint of abdominal pain. "After doing an ultrasonogram and a CT scan, doctors said he has been carrying an unborn baby," he said.

His abdomen began to swell from the age of seven. He has been suffering from malnutrition for long and has some mental problem, Belal said.

Doctors, however, say they have yet to find any link between the fetus and his mental problem.