

Bigger ADP

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The official said they may propose the NEC meeting a higher amount than what the finance ministry proposed as more fund is required to implement the 6th five-year plan.

In health sector, a Tk 58,000-crore programme will start in the next FY which needs an increased allocation, said a planning ministry official.

The construction of the Padma Multipurpose Bridge will start in full swing next year, said the official, adding that the government wants to complete the bridge within its tenure and if there arises no problem from the development partners' end the expenditure in the sector will go up.

According to finance division, Tk 1,545 crore has been allocated for the Bridge division while for the planning ministry Tk 1,448 crore, of which a large portion will be spent in the Padma Bridge project. The allocation for the power sector may also be increased by 42 percent to Tk 7,152 crore.

The much-talked-about transit with India, Bhutan and Nepal may open next FY. The government has a big expenditure plan for introducing the transit system.

The planning ministry official said the government keeping in line with the 6th five-year plan wants to raise the GDP-investment ratio to 27 percent in the next FY. The target was 25 percent for the current FY.

A high official of the planning ministry said government investment has to increase first to increase investment. To speed up ADP implementation, the government from the beginning of its assuming to power took various steps. Some more steps will be taken in the next fiscal year.

BNP plans

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movement demanding that the government steps down to allow holding of mid-term parliamentary polls.

She wants the 386-member national executive committee, a policy-making organ of the party, to be more dynamic before she starts the countrywide campaign of rallies, the sources said. They said after the mass contact campaign she is likely to announce programmes for an anti-government agitation.

Khaleda already assigned party's acting Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, and Standing Committee Member Nazrul Islam Khan the task of making a list of inactive members of the national executive committee.

Mirza Fakhrul told the Daily Star that they will sit soon to decide how they will go about identifying the sleeping members of the committee. "The direction has come from the chairperson so we can't ignore it," he added.

Party sources said the process is being delayed due to Nazrul's illness. It will start after he gets well, they said adding that senior leaders of the party will help Mirza Fakhrul and Nazrul in preparing the list.

Sources close to the process said those who consistently failed to take part in the party's recent anti-government programmes such as street demonstrations are being considered as "inactive". The chairperson is annoyed with such members and they might be dropped, they said.

The national executive committee has so far met twice, the last meeting was held last month to review the political and economic situation of the country.

Committee Member Rehana Akhter Ranu, also a member of the parliament, raised the issue of "inactive" members at the meeting on April 23, and demanded they be dropped to make room for more dynamic leaders. She was cheered by a number of mid-level leaders.

Khaleda also took note of the demand and declared at the meeting that "inactive" leaders will be axed from the committee and replaced by those who are more active and dedicated to the party and its programmes.

IMF chief quits

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"An indictment has been voted and filed against the defendant," prosecutor John McConnell told a packed New York court minutes after Strauss-Kahn arrived for a new bail hearing.

His defence urged Judge Michael Obus to grant Strauss-Kahn bail, with his lawyer William Taylor assuring the court that former head of the International Monetary Fund was an "honourable man" who would not skip bail.

The hearing came just hours after Strauss-Kahn resigned from the IMF vowing to battle to clear his name after being charged with sexual assault, attempted rape and unlawful imprisonment of a hotel chambermaid.

"I deny with the greatest possible firmness all of the allegations that have been made against me," said Strauss-Kahn, who before the scandal broke was considered a top contender to be the next president of France.

Strauss-Kahn's statement paid tribute to his American-born wife, top television journalist Anne Sinclair, who was in court yesterday, saying he "loved more than anything."

The veteran French politician said it was with "infinite sadness that I feel compelled today to present... my resignation."

"I want to devote all my strength, all my time, and all my energy to proving my innocence," said Strauss-Kahn.

Defence lawyers said Strauss-Kahn would put up \$1 million in bail, surrender all his travel documents and submit to 24 hour electronic monitoring. A private security team would be with him "physically" until the electronic bracelet could be fitted today.

He would also agree to be confined round-the-clock at his daughter's New York apartment.

His lawyers were also expected to tout his wife's American credentials before

Obus, hoping to free him from Rikers Island jail.

The New York jail is a chaotic maze of holding cells filled with thousands of defendants who either can't afford bail or who, like Strauss-Kahn, are deemed a flight risk and have had their bail application denied.

Strauss-Kahn was refused bail in his first court hearing Monday, after a different judge deemed him a flight risk, and he has now spent three nights in the notorious jail in isolation and on suicide watch.

"These additional bail conditions eliminate any concern that Mr Strauss-Kahn would or could leave this court's jurisdiction," attorney Shawn Naunton wrote in the bail application.

But the lawyer for Strauss-Kahn's accuser, Jeff Shapiro, said his client, who has so far not been identified, was "alarmed" at the prospect of her alleged attacker leaving jail.

"The idea that this man would somehow or another be on the streets and free, I'm sure it would cause her a great deal of concern," he told CNN Wednesday. "She's very concerned about her security."

She alleges that Strauss-Kahn groped and mauled her in his room in the posh Sofitel hotel in Times Square and forcibly tried to have oral sex with her.

Police have taken away a section of a rug from the luxury suite which reportedly contains evidence of bodily fluids hoping to gain DNA evidence from the scene.

But Strauss-Kahn's lawyer Benjamin Brafman has said the evidence "will not be consistent with a forcible encounter," and New York media reports quoted a source close to the defence as saying "there may well have been consent."

Strauss-Kahn's resignation paves the way for the IMF to elect a new managing director as it steers delicate negotiations on the eurozone debt crisis.

Obama

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right to defend itself and said that the unity deal between Fatah and the radical Islamist Hamas movement posed "profound and legitimate questions" for Israel.

He also bluntly told Palestinians that their effort to try to win recognition at the UN General Assembly in September would fail.

"Symbolic actions to isolate Israel at the United Nations in September won't create an independent state," Obama said.

But the president also made clear he expected significant concessions in any revived peace process from Israel.

"The borders of Israel and Palestine should be based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps, so that secure and recognized borders are established for both states," Obama said in the speech at the State Department.

Netanyahu has vigorously opposed to a formula that would see Israel withdraw to the borders in place before the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

Obama also made clear he would support however another Netanyahu red line - the need for the future Palestinian state to be "non-militarised."

Mamata

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minister today.

The swearing-in of the popular 56-year-old Trinamool Congress supremo will be held at the 208-year-old Raj Bhawan, a British era building in Kolkata in the presence of 3,200 invitees. The ceremony begins at 1:01 pm.

Mamata, who will be the eleventh chief minister of the state, will be administered the oath of office and secrecy by Governor M K Narayanan on the south-west lawn of Raj Bhawan where shamianas have been erected. She will head the first non-Left government in West Bengal since Jyoti Basu led the first Left Front government to power in 1977.

The Trinamool Congress and allies Congress and SUCI stormed to power in the state with a three-fourths majority leading to this historic shift in the state's politics.

Her arch rival and outgoing chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee will be among the impressive guest list drawn from the top names in politics, business and art and culture at the ceremony today. Indian Home Minister P Chidambaram, Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee and Defence Minister AK Anthony are also expected to attend.

After the formal oath-taking the new chief minister will have tea with the governor and special dignitaries and later leave for the Writers' Buildings, the state secretariat in nearby BBD Bagh, to officially take over charge of her office.

Mamata is also expected to preside over her first cabinet meeting today presumably to announce the allocation of portfolios, officials said.

Ahead of taking up her new duties, Mamata yesterday resigned as railway minister. She has held the post since 2009. She also held the same post during the BJP-led government's reign prior to 2004.

Trinamool Congress will have 36 ministers in Mamata's government but the number of Congress ministers has not been disclosed.

A list of the 36 Trinamool Congress ministers were received by the chief secretary's office from the Raj Bhawan, sources in the state secretariat said.

Congress, which had fought the assembly polls in alliance with Trinamool, also decided to join the government.

"We are going to join the government. We have conveyed this to the honourable chief minister. You will get to know who from Star that he had heard about the GD and he would talk to his lawyer after he obtains the copy of the GD.



A 14-member Bhutanese delegation visits Saidpur airport yesterday to see the existing facilities there.

PHOTO: STAR

Bhutanese team

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airport from the landlocked country, located only 150 km away from its capital, Thimphu.

The Bhutanese minister expressed his satisfaction over the airport which is almost ready for flight operation. The delegation was accompanied by the Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister GM Quader and other high officials.

International flights operating from Thimphu often become risky due to adverse weather conditions like dense fog and severe cold, Quader said while talking to journalists.

Quader said further steps would be taken to renovate Saidpur Airport in compliance with international standard.

Bangladesh is willing to accept the Bhutanese proposal after informed of their conditions through discussions, he added.

However, sources said a tripartite agreement among Bangladesh, Bhutan and India is needed as air travelers must pass through India by land to reach Bhutan.

"Allowing us to use the airport will certainly promote the spirit of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)," said the Bhutanese minister.

The delegation including Dahos Bap Kesang, the ambassador of Bhutan,

Phala Dorji, the director general of civil aviation of Bhutan and other high officials reached Saidpur Airport by a helicopter of Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) around 12.45pm, reports our Nilphamari correspondent.

After inspecting the airport facilities, they held a one-hour discussion with their Bangladeshi counterpart at the VIP lounge before leaving for Lalmonirhat.

Our Lalmonirhat correspondent reports that the delegates reached Lalmonirhat Airport by helicopter at 2.15pm.

Mokhlesur Rahman Sarker, deputy commissioner (DC) of Lalmonirhat explained flight operation feasibilities to the Bhutanese minister while the Squadron Leader of Lalmonirhat Airport Ali Azam shed light on the technical aspects.

"Bhutanese minister will inform us about their choice of airport after returning to Thimphu," Quader said.

Earlier on Wednesday, Bhutan and Bangladesh signed an air operation agreement allowing each other to use their airports.

Under the new agreement both the countries are allowed to operate seven flights a week. Flights can also be operated to more overseas destinations from the countries.

Halda fishes

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depend on special factors like water temperature, specific water current, rain and lightning to lay eggs.

As rain started early on Wednesday, they started releasing eggs at different points including Keramtali, Ankurighona, Gorduara, Machuaghona, Napiterghona and Azimerghat, fishermen said.

Hundreds of spawn collectors in over 500 boats collected the eggs in a festive mood.

As of yesterday afternoon, 6,000 kgs of spawns were collected against 7,598 kgs last year.

They are being nurtured in seven government hatcheries and several other ditches dug by the locals.

The quantity of fries collected was around 250 kgs, said Monjurul Kibria, assistant professor of zoology at Chittagong University.

Provati Dev, district fisheries officer, said they collected some 150 kgs fries last year.

Spawn collectors said the mother fishes released only a small quantity of eggs on April 19.

In the 1960s and 70s, Halda fish used to meet the demand of eggs for two-thirds of the country's ponds, experts say.

Now the quantity of eggs has reduced significantly due to illegal fishing. Only 20 kgs of fish fry were collected in 2004, a steep decline from the 2,500 kgs collected in 1946, they add.

Hope for ACC

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A source, who had gone through the letter, yesterday told The Daily Star that the finance minister suggested that the proposed provision for making it mandatory to take government permission prior to filing corruption cases against government officials be scrapped.

The finance minister also opposed the proposal for curtailing the ACC's authority in appointing its own secretary, the source added.

Asked about the finance minister's letter, Suranjit Sengupta, chief of the parliamentary body, said, "He [Muhith] gave some suggestions about the proposed changes to the Anti-Corruption Commission laws."

Suranjit said donors, diplomats and other development partners are also concerned about the proposed changes to the ACC law. He said some diplomats talked to him personally over the issue.

The parliamentary body yesterday at the meeting, held at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, also questioned the proposed provision for awarding blanket coverage to government officials.

"If any government official is personally involved in corruption or assists in committing corruption, the state cannot take his responsibility. And in that case, no prior permission should be required for filing a case against the government official for the specific crime," Suranjit Sengupta said.

While talking to reporters at his office at the parliament after the meeting, Suranjit said the members of the committee questioned as to how this proposed provision would

serve the nation.

He said prior permission of the government may be needed to file cases against government officials who make decisions for implementing government policies for the country's welfare.

"The main purpose of the law is to protect honest government officials, not the corrupt ones," Suranjit said.

At yesterday's meeting, representatives of the cabinet division, however, defended the proposed changes to the ACC law while the ACC officials strongly opposed them.

The committee decided to examine other laws, jurisdictions and formations of reputed criminal investigation agencies like the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the USA and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in India, Suranjit said.

He said the committee will sit soon to complete scrutinising the proposed changes to the ACC law and will place its recommendations in the next parliamentary session.

THE PROPOSAL

The government came up with the bill to bring amendments to the ACC Act 2004 introducing provisions of prior government permission to file cases against government officials and begin trial of the cases under section 197 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898.

With the inclusion of this provision in the ACC law, no court shall take cognisance of an offence without prior government sanction to hold trial against a judge, or a magistrate or any public servant.

Prosecutors will have to submit proof of govern-

ment permission to the court before it begins trial of a judge or a magistrate or any public servant.

Section-197 allows the government to determine the nature of the offences under which government officials can be prosecuted. It can also determine which court would try them.

On the day the bill was placed in parliament, eminent jurist Shahdeen Malik told The Daily Star, "The ACC's independence will be curtailed greatly if the proposed amendments are brought."

He said the proposed provision of prior government permission to file cases against government officials is discriminatory. It also goes against the constitutional provision that says all citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection by it, Malik said.

FAKE MUJIBNAGAR GOVT STAFF

At yesterday's meeting, the committee also discussed the anomalies in the appointment of 190 sub-registrars in 2009. They had forged documents to prove they were members of the Mujibnagar government in exile to get the jobs.

The parliamentary body recommended that the law ministry take steps against them as per the law.

Astonishingly, the law ministry had found that 107 of 190 were below 10 years in 1971 and only one was above 18 then.

But all of them managed certificates to prove that they were staff of the Mujibnagar government and got government jobs, according to a probe report.

They all have even been posted around the country.

BCL activists

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current district unit leaders of Bangladesh Chhatra League blocked the main entrance of the office soon after the office hour began in the morning, according to bidders.

"The BCL activists snatched tender schedules from us as we approached the office after getting down from a CNG-run auto-rickshaw," said Rose Chakma, a first class contractor of PDB.

Two more bidders Upatishaya Chakma and Rezaul Karim made the same complaint.

"Some young men kept confined a contractor from Dhaka and me in an office room around 11:30am," said ABM Asaduzzaman, assistant manager of BRB Cables, Chittagong.

At one stage the youths threatened them of dire consequences if they dared to submit tenders. The two ultimately returned from the office without arguing with the boys.

Mizanur Rahman, project director of CHTREP, admitted receiving complaints from bidders.

He called in the law enforcers to keep peace and assured the complainants of taking necessary action.

Contacted, local Awami League and BCL leaders denied the allegation of obstructing the tender process.

US to provide

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The awards, which include transportation and freight costs, will be implemented under the Food for Progress (FFP) and McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition programmes, said a US Embassy press release yesterday.

In Bangladesh, FFP will provide benefits valued at \$21.8 million to 424,800 people in partnership with the Small Enterprise Assistance Funds (SEAF) and Winrock International. The McGovern-Dole award will provide benefits valued at \$30 million to 350,000 children through the World Food Programme (WFP).

Announcing the awards, US Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said, "These two international food assistance programmes support global food security and sustainable agriculture production in food-insecure nations, contributing significantly to the President's Feed the Future Initiative."

"But our efforts to support global food security are not just important to the many people around the world who do not have access to nutritious and safe food; they are also critically important to the sustainable economic growth of these nations, and the economic prosperity and national security of our own country," he said.

FFP projects are chosen based on their agricultural focus, programme impact, proposal quality, commodity management, the implementing organisation's capability and experience, and programme alignment with host government and US government country strategy plans, the release added.

McGovern-Dole participants either use or sell the donated US commodities in recipient countries to help support education, child development, and food security in low-income, food deficit countries that are committed to universal education.

For example, in Bangladesh, 350,000 children in more than 1,800 schools are being fed by the WFP with help from the McGovern-Dole Programme.

Thunder, duststorms kill 56 in UP, Bihar

PTI, NEW DELHI

At least 56 people were killed in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar when severe duststorm, accompanied by rain and thundershowers, lashed some parts of the states on Wednesday evening, according to All India Radio.

In Uttar Pradesh, at least 30 people were killed in cyclonic storm that hit several districts of eastern UP. Eight people were killed in Siddhartha Nagar, seven in Jaunpur, five each in Varanasi, Bhadohi and Ambekarnagar.