

Govt to amend

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some provisions of the existing Land Commission law in a bid to resolve land disputes," the state minister said in reply to lawmakers' queries.

"The government has already restructured the CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission after assuming office and most of the members of the commission think some provisions of the existing law should be amended," he added.

On recent clashes between different rival indigenous groups, the state minister said those took place due to internal disputes between the rival groups, not for the overdue election to the CHT Regional Council.

Besides, different indigenous groups consider illegal arms as major tools for their politics in the hill areas which is also a reason for the internal clashes," Dipankar Talukdar added.

The state minister also said the government has moved to recover illegal arms in the hills.

"Different quarters claimed non-implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord is the main reason behind the clashes among the indigenous groups. But this information is not correct," Talukdar observed.

During question hour, a number of ruling alliance MPs asked the minister about the reason behind the recent clashes between different rival indigenous groups. They also asked the minister about the government's measures to address the issue.

At least four activists of the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) were shot dead on May 21 at Barkal upazila in Rangamati.

The UPDF, a political platform of indigenous people opposing the CHT peace accord, alleged that rival Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) made the attack on its activists.

In another deadly clash on January 21, five people were killed in a gunfight between PCJSS and UPDF at remote Fakirchhara Bastipara of the district's Juraichhari upazila.

On holding the regional council polls, Talukdar said the district council election will be held first and the elected representatives will hold the regional council polls.

Bus service

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go to my workplace in Gulshan by a bus," he said.

Cloth trader Abdur Rashid, who journeys to Narayanganj from Gendaria by train almost every day, said the number of passengers on the route went up following the hike in bus fares.

"I go to Gendaria from Narayanganj by train for only Tk 6, which is around Tk 30 by bus."

The government will introduce railcars between the capital and its adjoining districts to improve the service to and from the capital, said another railway high-up wishing anonymity.

Each railcar is capable of carrying 300 passengers at a time.

The government will purchase 10 diesel and electricity-run railcars in the first phase and 20 more in the second phase.

Mobile courts have been conducting drives since May 15 to prevent bus operators from charging more than the government-fixed rates. The drives led to a fall in number of buses following the city roads.

Md Rafique, a bus driver of Tanjil Paribahan Ltd on Sadarghat-Chhriakhana route, said only seven of 25 buses of the transport company now run on city roads since the drive started.

AKM Shameem Akhter, deputy director (enforcement) of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority, said the drive will continue.

The government on May 16 increased bus fares by 30 percent with effect from May 19.

Never-ending

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At sunrise, she returns to her 1.5 decimal compound and sits on a wooden bed to wait for her savour.

"Nobody came. None from the government helped me," she told The Daily Star yesterday.

Her 42-year-old son Bashir Uddin sleeps on pavement, while two other children in rented houses.

The government did not help her, as none of the 12-member family was killed or injured, locals say.

At least 123 people, mostly women and children, were killed and more than 200 others injured in the incident.

Fire fighters said the blaze originated from a stove in a building that housed a combustible chemical warehouse on its ground floor. Coming in contact with those chemicals, the huge flames engulfed eight residential buildings and some 20 shops in a few minutes.

The families that lost their members got Tk 1 lakh each from the district administration.

As for Shamsunnahar, locals collected Tk 40,000 which she spent on food for herself and Bashir, who is not mentally sound.

Like her, many victims still suffer the wretchedness.

Many survivors who were critically burnt have yet to be fully recovered from their physical sufferings.

And they have mental trauma too.

"I'm trying to live with the memories of my sons and wife," said Gulzar Elahi, who lost 11 of his loved ones including his mother.

"I can't forget for a moment that my only son got burnt alive before my eyes," says Mamun Mia, another

Smuggled

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tortoises, a species native to South India. They are popular as pet for elegant patterns on their shells.

Suitcases, carrying the animals, safely crossed Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka but were seized in transit at Suvarnabhumi Airport en route to India.

The owner of the luggage escaped before police could arrest him.

The AFP did not mention the count of the animals that included gavials, the only surviving member of the once well-represented family Gavialidae and listed as a critically endangered species by IUCN.

It was the latest in a series of wildlife seizures in the kingdom.

Also, early yesterday customs officials seized 480 star tortoises from a Malaysia-bound Indian national at the Dhaka airport.

Wildlife expert SMARashid seeing photographs of the turtles and tortoises, told The Daily Star that the five species are Sylheti roof turtle, spotted pond turtle (*pora kaitta*), Bengal eyed turtle (*holud Kaitta*), Asian leaf turtle and Shila turtle.

The Sylheti roof turtle, last officially sighted in Bangladesh in 1986, is a critically endangered species while the rest are treated as endangered.

The star tortoise, much-coveted in pet trade across the globe, is listed under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species and a permit is required to export them. In July 2006, police recovered 1,600 tortoises of this kind at Rajshahi landport.

Thailand -- home to some of the world's largest wildlife trafficking operations -- seized more than 1,000 tortoises and turtles smuggled into the country on a flight from Bangladesh September last year.

Fake doctor

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Magistrate Saifur Rahman passed the order after A Wahab Khan, an associate professor of neurology at Sikder Women's Medical College and Hospital (Pvt) Ltd appeared before the court with his lawyer.

Lt Col (Retd) Altaf Hossain, acting principal of the college, filed the case against Wahab with Hazeribagh Police Station on May 10 on charge of fraudulence.

According to the prosecution, Wahab got appointed by means of forged medical certificates and documents.

survivor.

Four-year-old Sumaiya still wakes up at night crying in pain. Her head was so badly burnt, said her mother.

The fire has changed the life of Omar Faruk. The 20-year-old has lost his job, as he broke both his legs jumping from a building for life that night. Reduced to a man on crutch, he now lives in his Patia village of Chittagong.

But all is well for those responsible for so costly an accident. Though the fire spread following an explosion in the chemical warehouse, none was arrested or punished for the death of so many people.

"We could not take legal action against anybody as no case was filed in this connection," said Jamir Uddin Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Bangshal Police Station.

Even the chemical warehouses have not been shifted from the residential area despite High Court order.

Meanwhile, Faroo Akhtar Runa, Sakina Aktar Ratna and Asma Akhter, who lost their family members in the blaze and were later married off under the supervision of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, have been living with their husbands in the old town.

The fire broke out on the ground floor of Runa's building around 8:45pm when her gaye holud (celebration prior to wedding) was underway. Her family lived on the first floor of the five-storey building. Forty-four people of that building died in the inferno.

Govt to buy

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saying market prices of rice were high, and public procurement for providing price incentive to farmers was not needed.

The government decision to buy Boro rice now comes in the wake of falling prices of paddy in a number of districts.

Field reports received from Dinajpur, Rangpur, Thakurgaon and some other districts say paddy prices have gone down to Tk 460 a maund (around 37kg).

In many other districts including Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj, Mymensingh and Netrakona, the prices however ranged from Tk 550 to 750 a maund depending on the quality of paddy.

Meanwhile, food market analysts appreciated the government decision, saying "better late than never". They however noted purchase of rice, and not paddy, will mainly benefit rice millers instead of farmers.

"We have primarily targeted buying six lakh tonnes of rice. However, if prices fall, we will buy more," the food secretary said.

The government decision followed a meeting of the Food Planning and Monitoring Committee headed by Food and Disaster Management Minister Abdur Razzaque.

After the meeting held on Wednesday, Razzaque told journalists the government targets buying 11 lakh tonnes of rice from the local market in the next fiscal year. If it fails to do so, it will go for import.

The target of rice procurement this fiscal year is 12 lakh tonnes.

The government now has a food stock of 10 lakh tonnes. And import of three lakh tonnes more is in process, food ministry officials said.

Last year, the government initially bought Boro rice at Tk 25 a kg, and later it increased the price to Tk 28 following demands from the rice millers on grounds of high paddy prices.

Former food secretary Abdul Latif Mandal told The Daily Star if the government could buy paddy directly the farmers, it would benefit them. But the benefits will now go to the millers.

Prodip Kuma Roy, a leader of the civic body Democratic Budget Movement, said, "We urge the government to buy paddy directly from the farmers as they are already suffering losses in many northern districts."

The government-set Boro production target this fiscal year is 1.86 crore tonnes. Aman and Aus output last year stood at 1.22 crore tonnes and 1.7 lakh tonnes.

The country's food requirement is estimated at three crore tonnes a year.

TIB

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before the December 2008 election.

It also expressed concern over a news report published in national dailies saying that the government may allow whitening black money.

"The provision of whitening black money is morally unacceptable and unfair, irrational on the viewpoint of revenue collection, and above all, it contradicts the election pledges of the ruling Awami League," TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said in the statement.

If the government allows black money to be invested in stockmarket under pressure from interest groups, it will not only encourage corruption but also drive away general investors from the market, he added.

Continuation of the scope is regretful, as AL's election manifesto spoke against it, the statement read.

Flaws in Biman

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report based on the figures in the ledger.

Air Commodore (ret'd) Muhammad Zakiul Islam, Biman managing director and chief executive, said they will adjust the error in the next year's report.

After two profitable years in a row, the report of huge losses stunned the civil aviation and tourism ministry prompting it to demand an explanation from the Biman management.

Ever since Biman was declared a public limited company in February 2007, it had been making regular or even advance payments to Padma oil, and it continued till March this year.

"We made payments thrice a week," an official said requesting anonymity.

The issue has raised questions among Biman officials as to whether the "mistake was intentional to serve financial interest of a vested group".

A number of them said when everybody in Biman knows that the national flag carrier is making regular payments even an amateur cannot make such a blunder.

Biman suffered losses although it saw a two-percent rise in passengers last year compared to the number of previous year. It also operated less number of flights.

Biman chairman argues that a hike in the salary of its staff, pilots and crewmen and mounting fuel costs are the main reasons behind the loss.

Meanwhile, the parliamentary standing committee on public undertakings in a meeting on Monday asked the Biman authorities to come up with an explanation as to why it incurred the loss of Tk 80 crore, which is still the official figure.

Rejoinder

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4,700 employees, not 2,600 as carried in the report.

The rejoinder added that in 2010 the airline incurred a loss of about Tk 24 crore. As to the accumulated figure of Tk 510 crores in February, 2008, it is but misleading as there was a long list of payables against the figure that were deliberately not shown in the statement, it further said.

The rejoinder also said Biman owes no money to the mentioned simulator training provider. Nor is there any outstanding amount for paying off the crew as outstation allowance as stated in the report.

OUR REPLY
About Biman's claim of borrowing money from Bank for day-to-day expenditure, we place the matter to readers to judge whether borrowing money for meeting day-to-day expenditure shows healthy economic condition of an airline.

However, in its rejoinder Biman did not mention anything about its owes to Padma Oil and Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh.

We stand corrected that the number of employees of Biman is about 4,700.

On Biman's cash reserve of Tk 510 crores in 2008, the rejoinder did not contradict with the figure.

On outstanding amount regarding outstation allowance of Biman cockpit and cabin crews, several Biman staffs told The Daily Star that they were not getting their arrears for the last two months.

A sad Monday for Sangsad

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The law minister on Monday placed the proposal at a cabinet meeting following recommendation of the chiefs of parliamentary standing committees who had jointly moved for the law under article 76 of the constitution.

Article 76 (3) of the constitution says, "Parliament may by law confer on committees appointed under this article powers for (a) enforcing the attendance of witnesses and examining them on oath, affirmative or otherwise; (b) compelling the production of documents."

But many ministers opposed the proposal claiming it will be tough for them to work properly if the law is enacted.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who was presiding over the meeting, told her cabinet colleagues that the parliamentary committees are already enjoying increased power, according to reports published by different national dailies.

In the face of strong opposition from majority members, the cabinet rejected the proposed law titled "Parliamentary Standing Committees (enforcing witness and production of documents) Act 2011".

The cabinet's refusal to place the proposal as a bill in the parliament seems to have also ignored the House's jurisdiction to consider whether it will enact such a law for smooth functioning of its committees which play a vital role in making the parliament effective.

In foiling the move, the cabinet followed the path of its predecessors.

No government so far moved to enact such a law since the enactment of the country's constitution in 1972.

All governments rather opted to prevent empowerment of the parliamentary bodies, in efforts to avert strong parliamentary oversight of the government's executive activities.

In the current Jatiya Sangsad, the parliamentary bodies have also been facing tremendous difficulties in performing their duties as

they cannot ensure attendance of witnesses or compel anybody to produce documents required for making decisions.

Under such a situation, at least 21 chiefs of the same number of parliamentary committees sat at a meeting on February 15 and discussed the draft proposal prepared by the law ministry on recommendation of the parliamentary standing committee on law ministry.

Based on the committee chiefs' recommendations, the law ministry finalised the draft proposal and placed it before the cabinet meeting on Monday for its nod for placing the proposal in parliament as a bill.

Although the cabinet foiled the parliamentary committee chiefs' significant move, the cabinet might never be held accountable for this action.

It is because, although the cabinet is constitutionally accountable to the parliament, MPs do not enjoy the freedom to perform independently in the House.

Article 70 of the constitution made them "prisoners" of their party lines. According to the article, an MP will lose his or her membership in parliament if he or she goes against party decisions in the parliament.

Although questioning or criticising the cabinet's rejection of the "Parliamentary Standing Committees Act 2011" will not risk any MP's membership in the parliament, none of the ruling coalition MPs will probably feel encouraged to raise the question fearing other consequences within respective parties and the coalition.

Opposition MPs could have freely raised the issue and criticised the cabinet. But thanks to their boycott of the current session, the cabinet is free from any such criticism right now.

The parliamentary special committee on constitutional amendment moved to free the lawmakers from the "party shackle", by proposing changes to article 70.

The special committee prepared a proposal for allowing lawmakers to express opinions and cast

votes against party decisions in the parliament excepting on three issues -- no confidence motion against the government, national budget, and matters related to state security.

Unfortunately, on Monday, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina opposed that move as well.

The premier also rejected the special committee's another proposal for restoration of the House's authority to remove constitutional officials including Supreme Court judges on grounds of misconduct and physical inability.

The original constitution of 1972 empowered the House with that authority, to ensure its preeminence. But the House lost that power when the Supreme Judicial Council was introduced by military ruler Ziaur Rahman in 1975.

Rejecting the special committee's proposal on Monday, the incumbent premier also opted to maintain the current provision of Supreme Judicial Council.

It seems that Monday was a sad day for the parliament, as all three significant proposals for strengthening the House were rejected.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, also chief of ruling Awami League, might not have forgotten her party's electoral pledges, but her actions ran counter to AL's poll promises.

The AL electoral manifesto titled "A Charter for Change", that contributed much to the party's overwhelming victory in the last parliamentary election, says, "The parliament will be made effective and the government will be made accountable for all its activities. Except for some specific subjects related to the security of the state, parliament members will be allowed to express differing opinions."

In efforts to establish good governance, AL also promised to appoint an ombudsman to investigate allegations of corruption and abuse of power by any public authority. But realisation of the promises has remained elusive for more than two years.

Limon

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Savar NGO will arrange for his artificial leg."

He said now Limon has to continue certain exercises.

However, Tofazzol said Limon is not completely recovered as he suffer from fevers regularly and pain.

The doctors assured them they would allow Limon to stay in the hospital until Sunday.

Tofazzol said, "If we have financial help I will shift him to a private clinic."

Limon, 16, has been undergoing treatment at National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (Nitor) after his release on bail on May 9. He got shot on March 23 at his village Satura in Rajapur of Jhalakathi during a Rab operation there.

Meanwhile, home ministry investigator Shawkat Akbar reached Rajapur around 10:45am. Behind closed doors, he talked to Zahangir Hossain, Rajapur upazila nirbahi officer, Sub-Inspector Arifur Rahman, investigation officer of the two cases lodged by Rab against Limon, Sub-Inspector Abdul Halim, investigation officer of the case lodged by Limon's mother against six Rab personnel.

He told The Daily Star over phone that it was his third visit after taking charge of the investigation and he will try to submit his report on Sunday. His superiors would forward the report within a day or two.

Tarique's plea

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October 26, 2009 with Dhaka Cantonment Police Station against Tarique and his business partner Giasuddin Al Mamun under Money Laundering Prevention Act 2009.

They were charged with laundering Tk 20.41 crore to Singapore between 2003 and 2007.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam told The Daily Star that now there is no bar to run the case against Tarique under Money Laundering Prevention Act 2002.

ACC's lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan said both accused of the case--Tarique and Giasuddin-- will be tried simultaneously at the trial court following the SC order.

Ahsanul Karim, a counsel of Tarique, said they would be clear about the SC order after receiving the full text of it.

The SC on February 9 ruled that the case trial can be held under Money Laundering Prevention Act 2002, as the alleged offence took place before the 2009 act.

Tarique, now in London for treatment, filed the review petition on May 2.

Hartal

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caretaker government system, she said that the government has nothing to do but comply with the verdict of the country's apex court.

The Election Commission would be strengthened so that it could conduct the polling and perform other activities independently, the PM said adding that e-voting would also be introduced to hold a free, fair and neutral election.

Chairman of Nitol-Niloy Group Abdul Matlub Ahmad and FBCCI Vice President M Jasim Uddin led the delegation.

Soccer coach

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Qatar Airways flight in the morning without informing anybody in Bangladesh Football Federation, said a BFF official, seeking anonymity.

The 14th foreign coach of Bangladesh signed a one-year deal with BFF in last September and it was due to end in August.

Till filing of this report today around 2:00am, no official announcement has come whether Rubcic has resigned.

The BFF official said Rubcic was unhappy lately, as he was unpaid for the last four months. Also, he was not getting his food allowance, \$600 a month, as promised by the federation.

Weather cycle goes normal

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were equally distributed across the country, said agro-economists.

In April, the rainfall was 39 percent less than what it normally occurs in this month. Rajshahi division, however, witnessed 37 percent more rains than the average. Overall, the total number of rainy days this year so far was more than the usual against the backdrop of the last two weak rainy seasons.

"This has put a favourable impact on the temperature," said a senior meteorologist working with the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc).

In the long forecast for Bangladesh, the met office said the rainfall will be normal in May, June and July and this would have a positive impact on agriculture.

According to met experts

raining -- almost every day -- during pre-monsoon season is typical.

The weather is vital to a country like Bangladesh where over 60 percent people depend on agriculture.

Over 70 percent of the total rainfall during the monsoon is considered the best condition for sowing paddy.

Last year the monsoon came a bit late. The July, 2010 was the driest July of the decade which threatened Aman cultivation and caused huge damage to other crops. The almost-drought season even prompted some farmers to marry off frogs, a rainmaking ritual.

In 2009, there was not enough rain in mid-July. It made difficult for farmers to prepare their field for Aman rice. For rain they had to wait till August that year.

But this year, agro-meteorologists believe that

the weather will remain favourable.

Of possible impact of rain on crops, Agro-meteorologist Md Shameem Hassan Bhuiyan told The Daily Star that the pre-monsoon rain this year helped cultivation a great deal. Favourable temperature and rain had a vital role in bumper production of crops like Boro, wheat and jute.

The Boro paddy cultivation starts in November-December and needs more irrigation because of the dry season, he said, adding that this year's rain provided the water saving a lot of irrigation cost.

"I have talked to agriculture officers of Godagari upazila in Rajshahi and he told me that the farmers needed less irrigation for Boro cultivation this year," said Shameem Hassan.

BSS act shocks HR boss

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Recognition of Indigenous: Right on Land and Forest at the Jatiya Press Club.

In this regard, the NHRC chairman referred to a news report released on Wednesday night by state-run Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS).

He said he was "confused and disheartened" that the BSS killed and withdrew its report within hours of its