

Govt not rigid

FROM PAGE 1
Hasina blamed the caretaker government system for the 1/11 changeover and said the undesirable event would not have happened, had there been a political government in its place in 2007.

She said many quarters are making preparations to stay in power for long by creating another situation like that of 1/11 in the country.

The ruling party's highest decision-making body organised the meeting to discuss the latest political developments including tomorrow's hartal and much-talked about caretaker government system, declared illegal recently by the Supreme Court.

The AL-led grand alliance boycotted the January 22 election in 2007 when the then president Iajuddin Ahmed appointed himself the chief adviser to the caretaker government. There had been mass protests across the country following the event, said Hasina, also president of ruling AL.

She said the parliamentary special committee on constitution amendment was formed to strengthen the caretaker government system further by plugging the loopholes in the system. But the apex court declared it illegal and the government now has nothing to do with the issue.

Hasina questioned why and in whose interests the BNP chairperson called the hartal.

Referring to the main opposition's threat to boycott the next election if held under the AL government, she asked who the people were that incited Khaleda to make the threat of boycotting the polls.

Reiterating her commitment to run the country in compliance with the constitution, the prime minister said the Election Commission will function independently and her government will not interfere in its activities.

"We want that the electronic voting machine gets introduced. We don't know why BNP opposes it and what they want?"

Pointing at those who advocate for the caretaker government system, she said there is no guarantee that those who had not suffered during the tenure of the last caretaker government would not fall victim to the system in the future.

The party's programmes on June 7 and June 23 were finalised at the meeting and some AL leaders requested the party president to take steps to hold councils at the party's grassroots levels.

Hasina said the councils will be held immediately after the Union Parishad elections.

AL Joint General Secretary Mahabubul Alam Hanif told The Daily Star after the meeting that the ward unit councils of the party would be held by October, thana and upazila unit councils by November and district councils by February next year.

He also said the party's national council is scheduled to be held in July next year.

Presidium Member Obaidul Quader stressed the need for holding immediate council to Bangladesh Chhatra League, pro-AL student body, which has been running without any council for the last four years.

Mamata

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afternoon are Pramathanath Roy, Manoj Chakraborti, A B U N A S E R K H A N Chowdhury, Sunil Chandra Tirkey and Sabina Yasmin.

The expansion of the ministry pushed up its total strength to 43.

The Congress already has two cabinet ministers--Manas Bhunia and Abu Hena.

Mamata and Bhunia, who is also the West Bengal Congress president, were present at the Throne Room of the Raj Bhavan where the swearing-in took place.

Mamata was sworn in as chief minister on May 20 along with 38 other ministers after a landmark victory in state legislative assembly elections that saw the fall of 34 years of uninterrupted rule by CPI(M)-led Left Front.

EC proposes law

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article-118 (1) constitution says, "... the appointment of the CEC and other election commissioners (if any) shall, subject to the provisions of any law made in that behalf, be made by the President."

But the law has not been formulated since the constitution was framed in 1972.

In absence of the law, successive governments appointed people as per their choices as CEC and other election commissioners triggering political controversy.

The EC-proposed legislation gives details on the procedure of an appointment. It suggests introduction of a strong search committee to find sound people and parliamentary scrutiny of those people recommended by the search committee for posts to the EC.

"The future appointments will be better if the law can be made, specifying a set of criteria for the appointments," Election Commissioner Sohul Husein told The Daily Star recently.

He said there is no alternative to making the EC widely acceptable to all by appointing non-controversial persons to the constitutional body for holding free and fair elections.

Formation of the EC has recently become crucial after the Supreme Court declared the caretaker government system illegal and void.

Besides, tenure of the current EC will expire in February, 2012, and a new EC will be constituted that will hold the parliamentary elections in early 2014.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at a press conference Tuesday said her government would take steps to make the EC stronger.

Some members of the parliamentary special committee on constitutional amendment at a meeting with the prime minister Monday also spoke for strengthening the EC.

A member of the special committee told The Daily Star that they may propose specifying the number of EC members to three and recommend enactment of a law under article-118.

He said they will discuss in a meeting tomorrow how to strengthen the EC with financial autonomy.

The Daily Star got a copy of the EC-proposed law titled "Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioner (appointment procedure) Act, 2011".

According to the proposal, a five-member search committee will be formed with the chief election commissioner (CEC), as its convener, to prepare a list of people for appointment to the EC.

A judge, nominated by the chief justice; the chairman of Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), chief of the Public Service Commission (PSC) and the comptroller and auditor general will be members of the search committee.

The search committee will recommend three names for each position.

The 15-member Business Advisory Committee (BAC) of parliament, led by the

speaker, will then finalise the list after scrutiny and the president will appoint CEC and other election commissioners from the list.

The EC believes, with the proposals made into law, political consensus on appointments can be achieved as the prime minister, leader of the opposition in parliament and senior leaders of the ruling and opposition parties are members of the BAC.

In absence of the law, there is no qualification or disqualification criteria for individuals to be appointed as CEC or election commissioners.

On the advice of the prime minister, the president is constitutionally empowered to appoint anybody as CEC or as election commissioners.

The proposed legislation comes with some qualifications required for the candidates and some disqualification criteria.

People with administrative efficiency, honesty and integrity will be considered competent for the posts to the EC. Individuals should be disqualified if they were not considered honest, not earning legally, member of any national or local political party or a party's associate body, or if they had interest in contesting the general elections with the backing of any political party, the proposed legislation said.

The draft law also disqualifies candidates who are loan defaulters, as borrowers, company directors or partners of a defaulting company. It also proposed to specify the number of members of the EC to three. According to the proposed law, the EC would consist of a CEC and two election commissioners including one woman election commissioner.

Currently, the president is empowered to appoint unlimited number of election commissioners. The EC earlier sent a similar proposal to the last military-backed caretaker government in early 2008. But the interim government did not pay heed to it.

Osmaninagar police seized the bus while the driver and helper of the bus fled.

The dead were identified as Habib Uddin, 45, his daughter Mita, 5, and son Motosir Ahmed Hridoy, 15, Habib's brothers-- Hanif Uddin, 28, Sujon Uddin, 32, Salah Uddin, 20-- and sister Rita Begum, 10, and the car driver Anwar Ali, 28, of Ramjanpur.

The family yesterday received Habib at Sylhet Osmani International Airport upon his return from the UK, said the OC.

Police said the family members were on way to their village home at Inatganj of Nabiganj upzila in Habiganj district.

The bodies were with the highway police at Sherpur until filing of the report at 10:00pm.

Mladic appears

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"I would like to read and receive these obnoxious charges against me. I want to read it with my lawyers," Mladic told a panel of three judges in The Hague.

"I need more than a month for these monstrous words that I have never heard of," the ex-general dubbed the "Butcher of Bosnia" said of the claims.

Better known from media images as a stocky commander wearing war fatigues, Mladic appeared before judge Alphons Orie in a grey suit and gold and black tie, markedly older and thinner.

"According to the indictment you, Ratko Mladic, are charged with genocide, crimes against humanity and under rules governing the customs of war," judge Alphons Orie told the accused.

The judge set July 4 as the date for Mladic's next appearance, by when he will be required to enter pleas to the 11 charges against him.

After spending 16 years on the run from being arrested

for atrocities committed during Bosnia's 1992-95 war that killed 100,000 people, Mladic was arrested in north-east Serbia last Thursday.

The 69-year-old is accused of masterminding the Srebrenica massacre -- Europe's worst mass killing since World War II -- and the 44-month siege of the capital Sarajevo from May 1992 in which 10,000 died.

He was flown to the Netherlands on Tuesday to stand trial before the ICTY after Serbian judges denied his appeal on health grounds and found him fit to stand trial.

Mladic's one-time mentor, Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic, died in The Hague four years into his own genocide trial in 2006, of a heart attack.

And his former political chief, Radovan Karadzic, has been conducting his own defence in a war crimes trial that started in October 2009.

If he pleads guilty, there will be no trials and a date will be set for a sentencing hearing, Mladic faces a maximum sentence of life in prison.

Let's say

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At least 123 people, mostly women and children, were killed and more than 200 others injured in the fire that originated originated from a stove in a building that housed a combustible chemical warehouse on its ground floor.

Local MP Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin inaugurated a monument named Nimtoli Tragedy in the memories of the dead.

In a remembrance meeting at Nawabkatara Primary School in old town, speakers, many of them local Awami League leaders, urged the people not to rent out their houses to chemical traders.

However, 18-year-old Sobuj, who lost six of his loved ones, alleged there are many such chemical stores in the adjacent areas but the law enforcers do not take any steps against them.

"We not only lost our family members. We lost everything. I'm still workless," he said.

On recovering from their wretchedness, Sharif Dolon, another young man who also lost several family members, said many organisations listed their names following the incident promising help. "None of them kept their words," he said.

The families that lost their members got Tk 1 lakh each from the district administration. The injured also received some of their treatment cost but those who lost homes got nothing.

Officer-in-Charge of Bangshal Police Station Jamiruddin Ahmed said they have heard that dangerous chemicals are still being stored in Old Dhaka, but they have no specific information.

He said on specific complaint they would go into action after consulting his high ups.

BNP pushes

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caretaker government system. We will wage a tougher movement across the country soon to realise our demand for a midterm election under a neutral and non-partisan caretaker government."

With banners and portraits of Ziaur Rahman, several thousand leaders, workers and supporters of BNP and its front and associate bodies marched from the party's Naya Paltal office to the National Press Club. They also chanted slogans in support of Sunday's hartal.

Earlier, after a meeting of BNP's divisional and Dhaka city unit leaders at the chairperson's Gulshan office, Mirza Alamgir said they were compelled to announce the hartal as "the government is going to snatch people's right to vote."

He urged the authorities to refrain from repression on opposition men centring the hartal.

BNP and its key ally Jamaat-e-Islami called a countrywide hartal for Sunday in protest at what they claimed was the government's plan to cancel the caretaker government system. A few others like-minded parties have already lent support for the hartal.

The Supreme Court recently in a verdict declared the caretaker system illegal. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said the system should not continue since the apex court declared it unconstitutional.

The prime minister on Thursday said BNP called the hartal against the court verdict.

Meanwhile, at a discussion at the National Press Club, BNP's standing committee member Moudud Ahmed said they called the hartal not against the court but the government's decision to repeal the caretaker government provision.

Three militants killed in Indian Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Indian police said yesterday they had killed three Islamist militants suspected of being from the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba militant group in a fierce gun battle in restive Kashmir.

The guerrillas were killed in Sopore town, 55 kilometres (35 miles) north of the main city Srinagar, police superintendent Altfaz Khan told AFP.

"The encounter broke out last evening when a joint party of police and army confronted the militants and ended with their killing this morning," he said.

Random parking

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observed.

But the understaffed DMP traffic wing has only four tow trucks, two of which are for VIP duties, he added.

Against this backdrop, the DMP authority is going to engage private companies in towing operation, and proposed the government increase fine and towing charge.

Mahbubur Rahman said, "Recently we have sent a proposal to higher authorities for procurement of 50 more wreckers [or tow trucks], and requested them to increase fine and towing charge."

According to the proposal, half of the towing charge will be sent to the government exchequer and the private company concerned will receive the rest. However, the fine money will not be shared.

"At present, we use wreckers only to create panic among those who have parked illegally. If one car is towed away from an area, the rest immediately get dispersed to avoid towing," he said.

However, different points of roads clogged with parked vehicles interrupting traffic movements is an everyday spectacle.

From Banglamotor to Moghbazar and from Mouchak to Moghbazar, vehicles are seen parked on either side of the road, occupying at least two-thirds space.

In front of high-rise business establishments like Siam Tower, Singapore Plaza and Kushal Centre in Uttara, four-wheelers remain parked leaving no room for other vehicles.

DMP sources said around 3,600 personnel of the traffic wing mainly control traffic movement at intersections and they have little time to take action against illegal parking at other places.

Contacted on May 4, a traffic official deployed at Moghbazar intersection, preferring anonymity, said, "We, five traffic personnel, are deployed at the intersections for maintaining signal and a traffic sergeant monitor the area."

If any of them leaves the intersection for a while, there creates chaos leading to accidents. So, he argues, it is quite impossible for them to check illegal parking away from the intersections.

A DMP high official said the traffic department has neither adequate man-

power nor the logistics to mitigate the parking woes.

Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk) sources said due to lack of staff they failed to ensure parking space at some buildings as per Rajuk approved plan.

In many cases, on completion of the highrises, the owners have built commercial centres on designated parking spaces and at basements.

Aminur Rahman, authorised official-1 of Rajuk, referring to almost all the buildings on Sonargaon Road at Kataban, said a number of shops have been set up at the parking spaces while the basements are being used as storerooms.

As per the new National Building Act of 2008, Rajuk has to issue occupancy certificates to the owners after inspecting parking management of the buildings.

No building owner is supposed to get any utility service connection without obtaining the certificate, Aminur added.

Had the authorities concerned taken steps as per the law, most city roads would be free from illegal parking, he added.

Yemen president

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president was "well."

The attack was blamed by the authorities on dissident tribesmen loyal to Sheikh Sadiq al-Ahmar.

"The Ahmar (tribe) have crossed all red lines," said Tareq al-Shami, spokesman for the ruling General People's Congress.

A Yemeni opposition TV station, Suhail, reported earlier that Saleh had died in shelling that hit the palace mosque.

Yemen has tipped swiftly toward civil war this week, with forces of the Hashed tribal confederation battling troops still loyal to Saleh in the capital and elsewhere.

More than 370 people have been killed, at least 155 of them in the last 10 days, since a popular uprising against Saleh's nearly 33 years in power began in January.

Before the attack on the palace, protesters paraded the coffins of 50 people it said were killed by Saleh's

forces.

Heavy fighting also spread for the first time to the southern part of Sanaa, an area held by forces loyal to Saleh and possibly marking a turning point in the conflict.

Explosions were heard in the southern city of Taiz, where the United Nations has said it is investigating reports that 50 people have been killed since Sunday.

Two policemen were killed in a rocket-propelled grenade attack, medical officials said, after security forces fired warning shot earlier at protesters gathering for Friday prayers.

Worries are growing that Yemen, home to a branch of al-Qaeda known as AQAP and next to the world's biggest oil exporter Saudi Arabia, could implode and become a failed state that poses a risk to global oil supplies and security.

In Sanaa, thousands have fled for safety as Saleh's

security forces battled members of the powerful Hashed tribal alliance led by Sadeq al-Ahmar in the bloodiest fighting since pro-democracy unrest erupted. One of the homes of a brother of Ahmar was shelled in fighting yesterday, witnesses said.

The bloodshed has eclipsed a mostly peaceful pro-democracy movement inspired by successful revolts in Egypt and Tunisia.

Yemen is engulfed in multiple conflicts, with street battles between tribal groups and Saleh's forces in Sanaa, popular unrest across the country and fighting against AQAP and other Islamist militants who seized the coastal city of Zinjibar.

The capital is split, with Saleh loyalists holding the south against tribesmen and renegade military units in the north.

Granite mine slides

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suppliers' credit contract with an aim to launch it before 2001. But the company neither provided the credit as promised, nor could it properly complete the construction. After a long delay, the mine launched commercial operation, but in incomplete state.

Sources said the mine's operation costs Tk 2.4 crore each month while its rock production hardly fetches Tk 15 lakh a day.

MGMCL Deputy General Manager Shamsul Mostafa said the company earned Tk 105 crore since August 2008 till date through 14 deals.

The mine so far extracted 11.09 lakh tonnes of rock and sold around 7.00 lakh tonnes till April 4. Around four lakh tonnes, piled up at the mine yard, have gone waste because of inappropriate crushing and sorting. The inventory was built to store only 40,000 tonnes.

However, Padma bridge project raises hope for the cash-strapped company to overcome its multiple problems including shortage of working capital and lack of room to stockpile the unsold rocks.

Construction of this bridge may require an estimated three crore tonnes of rock. But the 5.8km long Padma bridge project is yet to be started.

"If government procures rocks from us to construct Padma Bridge, the state-run company will overcome its monetary

crunches," said an official of MGMCL.

The mine has completed primary work to start a second shift by the end of this year ahead of Padma Bridge Project. This would help them at least double its production level.

The second shift would require 250 trained miners in addition to 292 miners working in one shift.

Though the country requires 60 to 65 lakh tonnes of hard rock annually -- way above the MGMCL's production capacity -- the mine has failed to tap the market and attract buyers.

In fact, a huge pile of high-quality rocks at the mine's backyard is left unsold due to lack of buyers.

MGMCL DGM (marketing) Shamsul Mostafa said the sale increased slightly in the last one year, but it is not enough to meet the company's expense.

Sources said all the boulder rock produced at the mine has remained unsold due to its extra large size. But demand for crushed granite [5-20 inches] is increasing in the local market.

The mining authority sells boulder rock at \$15 per tonne and crushed rock at \$17 per tonne.

The mine is costing the nation \$158 million. An Investment Committee in 2005 identified that a total of \$120 million has been invested in the mine. Of this sum, Bangladesh paid more than \$71 million although it is the borrower,

while lender North Korea gave \$49 million. But as the project was going nowhere, the MGMCL has conditionally taken over the unfinished mine in May 2007.

FBCCI

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Wednesday announced the countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal to keep the parliament from scrapping the caretaker government system.

Since the Supreme Court termed the caretaker government system unconstitutional and annulled it, this type of government does not exist any more, noted the FBCCI chief.

According to him, any political stalemate would hinder the country's economic progress. He suggested the political parties resolve the ongoing crisis through dialogue.

Azad also feared price hike of essentials ahead of Ramadan due to the strike.

FBCCI vice-presidents Jashim Uddin and Mostofa Azad Chowdhury and leaders of different chambers and business organisations were present, among others.

Meanwhile, Workers' Party of Bangladesh and Bangladesh Nagorik Samaj (BNS) in separate statements yesterday called upon the political parties not to create instability in the country on caretaker government issue.

People do not want to see any more violence in the name of politics, mentioned the civil society platform BNS.

Both the organisations urged the political leaders not to increase sufferings of people.

Woman shot

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head was rushed to Narsingdi Hospital and then shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where she is undergoing treatment at the intensive care unit.

A group of 10 to 12 Rab personnel in plain clothes went to Dhan Mia's shanty around 3:30pm, witnesses said.

After a while, locals heard someone screaming from that shanty and rushed to the spot to find Rahima lying in a pool of blood. The group then identified themselves as members of Rab-11. The Rab members pointed guns at the crowd and warned them that they would open fire if the local people come forward, locals said.

Dhan Mia's brother Dulal Mia said Dhan Mia is a rich-shaw-puller and Rahima is a house-wife and they are not engaged in drug peddling.

Meanwhile, Lt Col Gazi Mohammad Ahsanuzzaman of Rab-11 at a press briefing at Rab-9 headquarters in Bhairab yesterday said that on information they conducted the drive. Rahima was locked in a tussle with Rab personnel. At one stage, a stray bullet from one of the Rab personnel's arms hit her.

Rab claimed that before this incident, they arrested Mohammad Faruque from an adjacent shanty in connection with drug peddling.

3 children

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ascertained immediately.

The victims lived with their parents in the police line, police said.

Sick police constables, Animul Islam, Osman Goni, Fazlul Haq, Mohammad Faruq, and Shariutullah, all aged around 19, were rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital following the incident.

The other two sick policemen, whose identities could not be ascertained by police immediately, were admitted to Rajarbagh Police Line Hospital. All sick constables were on training in Mirpur Police Line.

Officer-in-Charge of Kafrul Police Station Abdul Latif said the kids went to the pond at Mirpur-14 for bathing around 3:30pm. When they were drowning, the policemen came forward to rescue the kids.

The sick policemen's colleagues, who transported them to hospitals, said poison had been put into the pond to kill its fishes so new batch of fry could be released for pisciculture, but there was no warning sign put up on the banks.

But OC Abdul Latif said he does not know anything about the poison.

It could not be ascertained whether poison caused the deaths as the bodies were handed over to the families without autopsy. There were no tests done on the policemen.

627 sacks

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supply depot (LSD) at Bera upazila in the district from the central supply depot (CSD) in Khulna, said police.

Acting on a tip off, Bera police raided the local warehouse owned by Gautam Datta in the municipality area at 11:00am and held a truck with 334 sacks of rice. They also picked up its driver Abdus Salam, and his helper Shahin Hossain for quizzing.

During the questioning, Salam told policemen that somebody, the person he knows by face, asked him to carry the rice to that particular storehouse instead of Bera LSD, Officer-in-Charge (OC) Sheikh Zillur Rahman of Bera Police Station told The Daily Star.

Police later searched the warehouse and recovered more 293 rice sacks.

The driver had documents for carrying the rice from Khulna to Bera, said Superintendent of Police (SP) Jahangir Hossain Matubbar of Pabna.

"Some government officials of the food department might be involved with the incident," he told the journalists.

District Controller of Food (DC-Food) Abdur Rakib of Pabna said he would make a departmental inquiry into the matter.