

HC RULE ON BTRC Audit of telcos stayed

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The High Court has stayed Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission's (BTRC) telco audit for four months.

The court also asked the commission to explain why it refused to implement the decision of the review panel of Central Procurement Technical Unit (CPTU) that directed fresh bidding to appoint firms for the audit.

Justice Farid Ahmed and Justice Sheikh Hassan Arif of High Court division of the Supreme Court issued the rule on June 23 following a writ petition by a chartered accountant (CA) firm.

Petitioner's counsel Sk Md Morshed said BTRC did not appoint the audit firms as per Public Procurement Rule (PPR). Besides, it bypassed the review panel decision by going forward with the audit.

The CPTU review panel in its decision cancelled BTRC's process of appointing the audit firms as it violated the PPR and recommended fresh bidding.

According to telecommunication law, BTRC requires prior approval from the telecom ministry to appoint consultants. But it did not obtain that either.

BTRC officials said they do not need such permission.

In a letter on May 24, the telecom ministry asked BTRC to take necessary steps in line with the review panel decision.

In reply, BTRC on May 26 countered saying that the appointment process was already over by then.

Meanwhile, BTRC this month published advertisements in newspapers for appointing two more CA firms for two more mobile service operators. No question has yet arisen on this second phase appointment process.

BTRC, in the first phase, appointed two CA firms out of a short list of six firms in April this year to audit GrameenPhone and Banglalink mobile service operators. One of the CA firms, that were denied the work, later challenged the bidding process alleging anomalies.

Asked about BTRC reaction to the HC rule, an official of the commission said they are yet to receive the copy of the rule and has nothing to say right now.

No more

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and hinted to go tough if the drivers do not follow the existing fare chart. The decision came from a meeting between officials of communications ministry and leaders of Dhaka Metropolitan Auto-rickshaw Owners' Association at the secretariat, with Communication Secretary Mozammel Hoque Khan in the chair.

Following the meeting, the owners' association and Dhaka Auto-rickshaw Sramik Union have withdrawn their strike from July 3.

The authorities agreed to increase the economic life of an auto-rickshaw to 11 years from 10 years. They turned down a demand to raise the daily deposit to Tk 800 from Tk 600.

Emerging from the meeting, Mozammel told reporters that the discussion was fruitful.

If any owner is found charging a daily deposit more than Tk 600, his facility for replacement of auto-rickshaw will be stopped, the secretary warned.

After raising the CNG prices by 50 percent to Tk 25 from Tk 16.75 per cubic metre, the government on May 16 increased the fares including waiting charge from Tk 1.25 to Tk 1.30 a minute. But the fixed fare for the first two kilometres remained unchanged at Tk 25.

The auto-rickshaw owners demanded raising the minimum fare to Tk 35 from Tk 25 and hiking the rate for each kilometre to Tk 9.50 from Tk 7.50 in Dhaka and Chittagong.

Money whitening

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the share market, steps will also be taken to make the market stable as per the recommendation of a probe committee.

The probe committee report mentioned many irregularities superficially. The prime minister said thorough investigation will be done and trials of perpetrators will be arranged.

Hasina also said the government would soon offload shares of state-run enterprises to stabilise the market.

She, however, urged the stock investors to make their investment decisions carefully.

Muhith, in his concluding speech, responded to questions and criticisms about the national budget for the upcoming fiscal year. He also presented changes to the tax proposals he made on June 9.

In his budget speech on June 9, Muhith proposed scopes for legalising undisclosed money through investment in treasury bonds and the infrastructure fund, but not in the stock market.

On allowing scopes to legalise undisclosed money through investment in stocks, he said a huge informal economy has developed in the country, which could be 42 percent, 62 percent or 82 percent of the GDP.

He said the wealth of the informal economy has to be brought to the mainstream economy. "So, scopes have been given to invest the undisclosed money in treasury bonds and the infrastructure fund."

He said the arrangement gives special incentive to undisclosed income, which is unethical.

"But those who will invest from their disclosed income will enjoy 10 percent tax rebate. We have done this on ethical grounds," Muhith said.

The minister said all efforts to bring undisclosed money to the main economy went in vain in the past. In 2009-2010, only Tk 922 crore was legalised, which shows that it is not a good method.

"The best solution could be bringing changes to the tax system that discourages tendency to evade taxes," he said. "This budget has also targeted it."

In the budget proposal for the next fiscal year, income tax at source on exporters

Lagarde

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India and Brazil.

The post became vacant following the resignation of Dominique Strauss-Kahn.

"The results are in: I am honoured and delighted that the board has entrusted me with the position of MD of the IMF!" Lagarde said via Twitter minutes after the announcement.

In a statement, the IMF said its 24-member board regarded both candidates as highly suitable for the job, but had decided on Lagarde "by consensus".

4 held

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who led the drive, told The Daily Star that they arrested Hanif from the city's Karwan Bazar area around 2:00am.

A few hours later they tracked down the remaining thugs from the city's Kalabagan and seized the looted revolver, two machetes and a petrol bomb from their possession.

Later, DB officials recovered 35 tolas of gold ornaments from a jewellery shop at the capital's New Market, headed.

"A gang of eight robbed the house on the fifth floor of Eastern Tower around 1:10pm," the detective said.

The remaining five, including the ringleader of the gang, Rana, 32 is on the run.

During preliminary interrogation, the detainees confessed that they sold the ornaments for Tk 11,20,000 and disbursed the amount among them, while they kept the revolver to help them in their future 'projects'.

All four suspects were produced before the court seeking remand for 10 days.

Earlier on June 19, armed robbers looted around 255 tolas of gold ornaments, a licensed loaded revolver, six rounds of bullet and Tk 5 lakh in broad daylight from a flat in the city's New Eskaton.

and readymade garment factory owners was increased to 1.5 percent from 0.5 percent. Now it has been cut to 0.7 percent for exporters and for readymade garment 0.6 percent.

In the budget, Tk 20,000, Tk 15,000 and Tk 5,000 per square metre at source tax (based on location) were proposed on commercial buildings. Now it has been revised to Tk 8,000, Tk 6,000 and Tk 2,000.

The poultry industry has been given tax holiday. All types of duty on poultry feed and LPG cylinder have been withdrawn.

Import duties on machinery used by public transports and motorbikes have been withdrawn.

The cigarette companies, if listed, will pay 35 percent tax instead of 42.5 percent.

All proposed duty on ship-breaking industry has been withdrawn.

Muhith said interest rates on savings certificates have been increased.

The minister also responded to criticisms from various quarters on budget implementation issue.

"The government will sit with development partners every three months in the upcoming fiscal year to speed up implementation of projects financed by foreign aid."

He said inflation would pose the biggest challenge for the government in the next fiscal year. "We will take steps so that the poor can buy the five major essential commodities at tolerable prices."

Unelected

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proposing some major changes including scrapping of the provisions for caretaker government system was finalised after scrutiny by the parliamentary standing committee on the law ministry.

She said though her party has a three-fourths majority in parliament, it would consider the opposition's "fair suggestions" even if they come after passage of the constitutional amendment bill.

Hasina said, "The elected representatives will do whatever is required. We will not allow others to interfere."

"We want people's power to remain in people's hands. Parliament will decide what to do [to resolve the caretaker government dispute]."

Referring to the Supreme Court verdict that declared the caretaker government system illegal but observed that the next two parliamentary elections could be held under the system, the prime minister said parliament will decide about it.

"For this, discussion is required. But the opposition did not join the discussion on constitutional amendment in last 11 months."

She called upon BNP chief Khaleda not to be influenced by others while taking stance on the caretaker government system.

Hasina said that during the last caretaker government rule the army had offered her status and facilities of a prime minister on condition that she did not participate in the election. "But I refused, as I don't do such politics."

Blasting BNP for its opposition to allowing whitening black money, she said former prime minister Khaleda, her two sons, her finance minister and many other ministers and their sons had whitened black money. "Now it should be enquired how much black money they have whitened."

The Awami League chief slammed pro-BNP lawyers for their agitation against Khaleda's younger son Arafat Rahman Koko's conviction in a money-laundering case.

That Khaleda's son had taken bribe and laundered money were proved by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation and Singapore government, she continued.

Koko was sentenced to six years in jail as per the law of the country. "You [Khaleda] have taught your sons how to steal and commit crime. The state bore their educational expenses but all they learnt was how to commit crime."

On the proposed budget, the prime minister said, "It is not ambitious at all. We will be able to implement it."

The House leader's hour-long speech was punctuated by desk-thumping from the treasury bench.

Bill ready

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prepared its report after scrutinising the constitutional amendment bill which will be placed in parliament today.

According to the proposed changes, the court shall hear EC's views in defence of its action before it gives verdict or directives on petitions filed against the commission.

"No petition will be entertained by the court and no orders or directives will be issued without hearing the Election Commission," Suranjit Sengupta, chief of the parliamentary body, told The Daily Star after a meeting yesterday.

The House body decided to propose for the change in the constitution following a proposal by the commission.

The EC proposed for scrapping court's jurisdiction of reviewing its actions during the election period that begins with the announcement of polls schedule and ends with publication of results through gazette notification.

Previous experience compelled the EC to seek these amendments.

Following court orders, the EC had to destroy more than 24 lakh ballot papers printed for eight constituencies ahead of the December 29, 2008 parliamentary elections.

Similarly, 21 candidates entered the race in 18 constituencies just 10 days before the polls, making the EC's job harder. Their applications seeking candidacy were rejected by the returning officers and was upheld by the EC.

Being turned down, they took their issue to the Supreme Court, and in most cases the EC learned the matter from court orders.

Chief Election Commissioner ATM Shamsul Huda and Election Commissioner Muhammed Sohul Hussein yesterday joined the parliamentary body's meeting.

The CEC on Monday wrote to the committee chief expressing his willingness to attend the meeting.

However, the committee did not agree with the proposal for scrapping the court's jurisdiction to review EC's actions taken during the process of polls.

The committee also did not agree with the EC's proposal to limit the number of its members to three including the CEC.

The constitutional amendment bill placed in parliament on Saturday proposed that the number of EC members be maximum five including the CEC.

Businesses

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Led by AK Azad, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the business leaders urged all members of parliament to reach a consensus over strengthening the EC which is the only constitutional body for holding free and fair polls.

The statement was signed by heads of 50 business chambers and 73 associations.

"We have observed with grave concern that the last caretaker government extended its tenure by two years from 90 days. During the period, people's basic right was trampled, businesspeople, politicians were undermined and tortured," said the statement.

The business leaders alleged that the rule of the emergency government hurt business and investment.

2 arrested

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Residential area around 12:30pm.

The arrestees Nasir Uddin, 40, manager of Fakhri and Sons, a business organisation and Azad, 28, driver of the excavator were caught while they were leveling the ground after destroying a hill.

However, two others managed to flee from the spot sensing the presence of police, Tajminur told The Daily Star.

A case would be filed soon with Sitakunda Police Station against owner of the organisation, Hossain-e-Fakhri and others involved in the crime.

Khaleda to announce

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Chairperson will announce the fresh programme on July 3," BNP Acting Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir told a protest rally in front of the party's central office at Nayapaltan yesterday.

He mentioned the prime minister will face trial for destroying democracy and the country's charter.

Responding to the demand of party workers and supporters for calling hartal, Alamgir said hartal will be declared after completing the mass campaign programme. BNP will build a movement step by step to unseat the government.

Earlier on June 23 Alamgir noted his party would announce the fresh programme on June 28, but the decision was changed

before the protest rally yesterday.

Party policymakers think the House will pass the constitution amendment bill including dropping the caretaker government (CG) system very shortly as the ruling party enjoys an absolute majority, party insiders said.

The BNP high-command decided to go for a tougher agitation programme once the bill is passed, they added.

The Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia has already declared her party will not join the next general election without a caretaker government.

Party standing committee member Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain said people are now ready for agitation as the government

failed in all sectors.

Party leaders Jamiruddin Sircar, Abdul Moyeen Khan, Zainul Abidin Farroque, among others, addressed the rally with city BNP convener Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka in the chair.

A procession of some leftist parties passed beside the rally. BNP leaders, workers and supporters clapped to the procession to express solidarity with the July 3 hartal called by the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports protesting a recent gas exploration deal with American energy company ConocoPhillips.

BNP and its allies observed a countrywide 36-hour hartal on June 12 and 13 against the move to drop the provision of CG system from the constitution.

New law on cards

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Commissioner and Election Commissioner (appointment procedure) Act 2011" in line with the country's highest charter.

The draft proposed enacting a law under article 118(1) of the constitution and curtailing the government's unilateral power to appoint CEC or election commissioners of its choice.

Article 118(1) says, "On the formation of the EC the appointment of CEC and other election commissioners (if any) shall, subject to the provisions of any law made in that behalf, be made by the president."

The law, however, had never been formulated since 1972.

The draft proposal also

recommended a five-member search committee convened by the CEC to prepare a list of people for the appointment to the EC. It proposed to specify the number of members of the EC to three one CEC and two election commissioners, of which one must be woman.

Currently, the president is empowered to appoint as many election commissioners he thinks required.

People with administrative efficiency, honesty and integrity will be considered competent for the posts.

One should be disqualified if s/he is not honest, earning illegally, member of any national of local political party or a party's associate body, or if they are interested

in contesting general elections with the backing of any political party, said the proposed legislation.

The draft disqualifies the candidates who are loan defaulters or directors or partners of a company which is a defaulter.

"The EC is now holding view exchange meeting with different political parties, members of civil societies and representatives from media leaders," said the information minister, adding that the view exchange is set to continue till the end of this month.

"It will be possible to finalise the draft proposal after the view exchange and steps will be taken to enact the law following that," he said.

Asma Kibria

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into the killing.

Terming the supplementary charge sheet incomplete and ill-motivated, Asma Kibria said in her plea that names of many bigwigs are missing on it, reports our Sylhet correspondent.

The then chief of Directorate General of Forces

Intelligence Maj Gen (retd) Sadik Hasan Rumi, several military officers and leaders of the BNP-Jamaat coalition government were involved in the murder, the petition added.

On her behalf, advocate Alamgir Bhuiyan Babul submitted the plea before the court of Senior Judicial Magistrate Rajib Kumar Biswas in Habiganj.

Kibria, also a former Awami League lawmaker from Habiganj, was killed in

a grenade attack on a rally at Baidyer Bazar in Habiganj on January 27, 2005. His nephew Shah Manzur Huda, local AL leader Abdur Rahim, Abul Hossain and Siddique Ali were also killed in the attack.

After an extensive probe, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of police on June 20 pressed charges against 14 more people, including former state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar and Harkat-ul-Jihad (Huji) leader Mufti Abdul Hannan.

Ten people were accused in the first charge sheet submitted in March 2005.

LOOKING BACK

The day after the grenade attack, Habiganj district AL Organising Secretary Abdul Mazid Khan (now a lawmaker) filed two cases with Habiganj Sadar Police Station.

JS body formation

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delayed beginning of all the sittings," says the research.

On average, each daily sitting was delayed by 33 minutes even though the ruling party has over two-thirds majority in parliament, which also experienced the largest ever period of boycott by the opposition.

"The trend of parliament boycott by the opposition has gradually increased and reached a level of concern. Turnout of those who go to parliament is also low," said TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman after briefing journalists about the research findings at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

Titled "Parliament-watch", the research reveals BNP walked out 16 times during its short stay in only 23 out of total 135 working days. The main opposition has so far boycotted 83 percent of working days, which was 59 percent and 42 percent in the eighth and seventh parliament respectively.

On average, the treasury bench lawmakers attended 66 percent of the House proceedings, while it was below 25 percent for the opposition lawmakers. Attendance of the leader of the House was 72.4 percent

against only five days or 2.9 percent by the leader of the opposition.

The research suggests reducing the deadline for mandatory attendance from 90 working days to 30 days to change the existing attitude of skipping parliament proceedings.

"Apparently our political culture suffers a lack of sense of accountability. Once elected, the lawmakers act in a way as if they were out of the question of accountability. All their activities are concerned with the interest of their respective parties or personal gain," said TIB Trustee Board Chairman Sultana Kamal.

Another interesting finding is that four percent of the total 433 working hours was spent in making irrelevant statements. In these statements, the lawmakers praised their party and party chief 616 times and criticised the opposition 808 times.

Fourteen out of the total 16 BNP walkouts were triggered by ruling party's criticism. In the latest boycott, BNP has been out of parliament for 48 working days since the first day of the fifth session.

Only around 8.5 percent of the total working hours was spent on formulating

laws and 24.5 percent on budget discussion, adds the research conducted on information collected from parliament and electronic media between June 2009 and December 2010.

Prof Muzaffer Ahmad, a member of TIB Trustee board, said "We are being deprived of the constitutional rights by a negative practice in parliament. The practice is not tabling the treaties or deals filed by the government with other countries for open discussion."

"The unfortunate fact is that such discussion never took place in parliament," he added.

The research suggests mandatory participation in the proceedings by both the leaders of the House and opposition, praising highest attendees and publishing a list of absentees, increasing working hours, and involving people in discussion before formulation of laws regarding public interest.

It also says the waste of money from the delay might be higher as its estimate only includes non-development and power expenditures. In addition to these two, the functioning of the House requires expenditures in some other service sectors.

Schoolgirl

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Officer (RMO) of the hospital Goutom Kumar Chakraborty said the victim was bleeding when she was taken to the hospital by police Monday night.

The alleged rapists, however, fled before police raided the spot and rescued the girl.

A rape case was lodged accusing the victim's brother-in-law and two others with Lalmonirhat Police Station.

Police said victim's brother-in-law, Lafiz Uddin, 30, of Mandopara village of Saghata upazila in Gaibandha on Sunday afternoon took her to Sahebpara in Lalmonirhat giving the excuse of visiting a relative.

The victim was kept in a locked room and gang raped during Sunday and Monday evening.

A team of police from Lalmonirhat Police Station rescued the victim around 10:30pm Monday after locals sensing the matter informed police.

When The Daily Star visited the victim in the hospital, she was hiding her face. She said, "I was locked in a room, where my brother-in-law Lafiz Uddin and two other unidentified people sexually assaulted me."

"I couldn't shout for help as Lafiz tied my mouth with a piece of cloth," she added.

"I would not go to my village, if the villagers, my classmates and teachers hear about this. I want exemplary punishment to the culprits," she said.

NGOs contribute

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In a written question, Israfil also asked the House to know how many associate or partner organisations are working under MJF.

In response, Matia Chowdhury, who is in charge of Prime Minister's Office in parliamentary business, said as many as 114 partner organisations are operating development and rights activities under Manusher Jonno Foundation.

And no allegations were found against any of its partners, she added.

Matia said a good number of partner organisations working under MJF in the field have been inspected by the bureau officials.

Answering to another question, she said the government takes action as per the law if any NGO is found corrupt.

"Field-level administrations often send report on activities of different NGO's to NGO Affairs Bureau," the minister said, "and the bureau takes effective steps on evaluation of the report."

Four factories

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Muhammadi Munir Chowdhury and aided by Rab, found that the factories--Sadma Fashion Wear Ltd and Shurichala Textile and Dyeing Mills--were operating without any approval from the environment department.

Even though the factories had effluent treatment plants installed but those were not functioning and they were dumping untreated waste into local canals and water bodies.

Sadat Composite Knit Industry Ltd had the DoE approval but it did not renew the approval after 2006. Gumti Textile Ltd had an effluent treatment plant but it was not capable of treating all its waste. It was dumping toxic chemicals through a bypass into a local canal.