

Death penalty

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rigorous jail term of three years to a maximum of 20 years, including fine or both depending on the nature of the crime.

Any Bangladeshi or foreign national using Bangladeshi land for terrorist activities in other countries or supporting such activities would be brought to trial under this act.

The approval came at the weekly cabinet meeting at Bangladesh Secretariat, with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

As per the act, a person or entity will be considered as a terrorist if the person or entity commits murder or injures, detains or kidnaps other(s) or do harm to someone else's property and uses or keeps explosives, flammable objects, firearms or other chemicals to destroy the integrity, solidarity, security or sovereignty of Bangladesh.

Earlier the cabinet on July 11 approved in principle the draft of the act and decided to bring some changes to it in line with international standards.

The Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG), the United Nations, International Monetary Fund, Asian Development Bank and World Bank recently recommended the government incorporate some international standard provisions in the act including death penalty as the highest punishment.

Accordingly, the government incorporated the death penalty as the highest punishment instead of the earlier provision of maximum 20 years' imprisonment.

The National Coordination Committee headed by Finance Minister AMA Muhith brought the changes to the act. It will now be sent to parliament to make it a law, said meeting sources.

The law will enable the government to investigate any suspicious financial transaction of any non-governmental organisation, financial institution and commercial banks. On demand, these institutions will be obliged to give all the information about their financial transactions.

Under the existing act, the government enjoys the power to investigate financial transactions of banks only. Amendment has been brought to the act redefining the financial institutions, a minister who attended the cabinet meeting told The Daily Star preferring not to be named.

In the final draft, property has been defined as moveable or immovable assets or profits derived from the assets or negotiable instruments. It recognises one's properties both in and outside the country.

"The main aim of the act is to curb militancy, prevent money laundering and combat financing of terrorism," a senior Home Ministry official told The Daily Star.

The APG is an international organisation of 41 members including Bangladesh. It is closely affiliated with the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF). All the APG members are committed to effectively implement the FATF's international standards for combating money laundering and financing of terrorism.

The cabinet meeting also endorsed the Power of Attorney Act, 2011, Disaster Management Act, 2011 and Jute Policy 2011.

Several ministers drew the attention of the prime minister about some "false" news in the local media on the performance and failures of the government in the last three years. They observed that the media is portraying the failures much more than the successes.

The premier suggested them to file objections with Bangladesh Press Council against those media and publish advertisements detailing the government's successes.

Record 97pc pass

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nations have been held and students were more confident and serious, Farhad Hossain, principal of Monipur High School, told The Daily Star.

Active participation of teachers is also a factor behind such an accomplishment, he observed.

Manju Ara Begum, acting principal of Vigarunnisa Noon School and College, gave credit to the government for distributing new textbooks among students on the very first day of the academic year.

"Students get excited after getting new books on the very first day, and of course, they become enthusiastic and attentive to studies."

Awarding certificates to successful students, stipends

and increased monitoring and evaluation also contributed to better results, they added.

"Learning from the past, we gave our best to make teachers more active by training them and giving them other facilities," Shyamol Kanti Ghosh, director general, Directorate of Primary Education, told The Daily Star.

This year, he said, the teacher-student ratio was brought down to 1:46 from 1:56 to provide more attention for each child throughout the learning process.

"The rise in the pass rate indicates teachers are more available in classrooms and they are giving more time to students. The government initiative to reduce the teacher-student ratio has worked," said Rasheda K Choudhury, executive director of Campaign for Popular Education.

The pass rate shooting up every year proves that students can do well if they get proper facilities and care, she told The Daily Star.

Rasheda K Choudhury, however, emphasised the need for quality primary education.

This year, a total of 23,16,521 students from 87,832 schools registered for the exams, of whom 21,85,747 showed up in the exam halls.

The examinations began on November 23 and ended on November 30. Students of class-V must qualify at the terminal exams to enrol in class-VI.

Across the country yesterday, jubilant students and parents, who had been suffering from nerves for the last couple of days, brought a festive mood into the atmosphere as soon the results were out.

Replacing the division system, this year's results were in grades in conformity with other public exams. So the government did not publish any merit list.

A total of 1,05,673 students or 4.97 percent of the total number passed, getting GPA-5, the highest grade point average.

Boys are ahead of girls in terms of success although the number of girls who sat for the exams was higher than boys. The pass percentage of boys and girls this year stands at 97.48 and 97.08, in that order.

Girls, however, outshone the boys in achieving the highest score with some 56,539 girls scoring GPA-5. A total of 49,134 boys got the distinction.

The top 20 schools include 17 from the capital, based on the number of registered students and GPA-5 holders, pass and absent rates. The remaining three -- from Comilla, Chittagong and Khulna -- secured seventh, 14th and 18th positions.

Monipur High School at Mirpur has emerged as the best in the country while Vigarunnisa Noon School and College and Motijheel Ideal School and College secured second and third positions.

This is for the third time that primary terminal exami-

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BNP men clash with police at Gaibandha Rail Station yesterday after law enforcers foil their rally. PHOTO: STAR

Cops foil BNP rallies

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separate processions in the afternoon and met on Gaibandha Railway station premises for the rally.

Police first resisted the activists and later resorted to baton charge to disperse them. As the agitated activists turned violent and pelted brickbats at the police, law enforcers fired eight rounds of rubber bullet, said Afzal Hossain Khan, OC of Sadar Police Station.

One police man was injured by the brickbats, he claimed.

District BNP President

Anisuzzaman Khan Bablu said, "Our programme was almost peaceful, but police suddenly attacked the gathering and 12 of our activists got injured."

In Rajshahi, police allegedly barred BNP supporters from gathering at Loknath School in the city. They did not allow anyone other than Rajshahi City unit BNP President Mizanur Rahman Minu to gather on the school premises for a scheduled procession.

Minu, also the party's joint secretary, along with his personal aide and an

elderly BNP man Ferdous Hasan waited there for the party men for three-hours since 3:00pm.

Later in the evening, Minu at a press conference alleged that police resisted BNP men joining a peaceful procession. He also termed the present government the most tyrannical and oppressive since the independence.

Contacted, Shahadat Hossain, OC of Boalia Police Station, refuted the allegation saying that a large number of police and executive magistrates were present at the scene to

avert any untoward incident.

In Noakhali's Majdee Court, police foiled a BNP procession yesterday evening. Law enforcers used batons to thwart the gathering, reports our Noakhali correspondent.

Later, the BNP supporters staged a protest rally at the municipal market premises.

BNP leaders and activists in Lalmonirhat town faced police interception at noon while bringing out a procession and later staged a rally in front of the party office amid police presence.

PM reiterates commitment on free EC

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dence Gono Bhaban.

Hasina, also president of the ruling Awami League, said her government would not compromise on the issues of strengthening democracy, people's rights and welfare, trying the war criminals and holding free, fair and credible elections.

"We have fought for these issues and there is no question to compromise on these issues," she said. The prime minister's press secretary Abul Kalam Azad briefed reporters after the meeting.

Independent editor Mahbul Alam, also the president of NOAB, led the delegation, which included Ittefaq editor Anwar Hossain Manju, editor and publisher of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam, Prothom Alo editor Matiuir Rahman, Samakal publisher AK Azad, Jugantor publisher Nurul Islam Babul, New Age publisher ASM Shahidullah Khan, Financial Express editor Moazzem Hossain, Sangbad editor Altamas Kabir, Inqilab editor Tommy Bahauddin, News Today editor M Rezauddin Ahmed, Karotoa Editor Mozammel Haq, Dainik Azadi editor MA Malek,

Dainik Purbokone editor M Taslim Uddin Chowdhury.

Information Minister Abul Kalam Azad, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister's Office Sheikh M Waheed-Uz-Zaman, and chief executive of the Center for Research and Information Mahbul Haque Shakil were also present.

The prime minister said her government was determined to strengthen democracy and freedom of expression in the country. Saying all the polls held under the present government regime had been free, fair and credible, she said the next parliamentary elections too would be held in a free and fair manner.

Sheikh Hasina said she did not have any desire to assume power again through vote rigging.

On the country's economic condition, the prime minister said although the global economy was going through tough times, the Bangladesh economy was in good shape.

She urged the editors to make sure that reports devoid of truth were not published in their newspapers.

The Independent editor

delivered the welcome address at the meeting on behalf of NOAB and lauded the prime minister for ensuring a free press in the country.

The Financial Express editor, however, expressed concerns about the current state of the economy in the country, bank borrowing, inflation, the rising price of the US dollar, and energy price, among other issues. Speaking about the stock market scam, he told the prime minister that she should not have been involved in dealing with market fluctuation.

In her response, the prime minister said her government was trying its best to contain the inflation. She added that the price of power had been increased due to hiked prices of oil and other commodities in the international market. About her involvement in the stock market, the premier said she also thought that the head of government should not be involved in it. However, there was no alternative but to get involved considering the stock market situation after the scam.

The Daily Star editor appreciated the prime

minister over her government's initiatives to boost food production, improving the education system and taking the initiative to hold the trial of war criminals.

He, however, voiced serious concerns over the confrontational politics in the country and mentioned that the revoking of the non-partisan caretaker government system would only add fuel to such politics. Mahfuz Anam also expressed his worries over the disappearance of some 22 people in the last one year, unabated river pollution, encroachment of rivers, and illegal high-rise constructions in the capital through a violation of rules.

The caretaker system of government having been declared null and void, he noted that there were doubts in the public mind as to whether the next election would be free, fair and credible. The people did not know what would happen in the country centering around the issue, added The Daily Star editor.

Mahfuz Anam also wanted to know from the premier about her strong commitment towards an

Soldiers attack Bissau army HQ over pay

AFP, Bissau

Soldiers demanding better pay attacked the headquarters of the armed forces in Guinea-Bissau yesterday and fanned out across the streets of the small west African state's capital.

There were no immediate reports of any bloodshed and sources among the mutinous soldiers were quick to dismiss any suggestion of a coup in the absence of the troubled country's president, who is undergoing treatment in France.

"We were caught off guard this morning by armed men who attacked the joint command as well as two other military units inside the headquarters," General Antonio Indjai told reporters.

"These men were attempting to get hold of weapons we had stored in the gun shop," he said without elaborating further.

Two military officials speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity said a number of navy officers were involved in the incident.

General Indjai was inside the headquarters compound in the central district of Bissau Velho when the renegade soldiers attacked but spoke to journalists from a military base in Bissalanca near the airport.

BNP to join talks

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But Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, a key component of the four-party alliance, will not be invited due to the party's many leaders' involvement in war crimes during the country's Liberation War in 1971, Bangabhaban sources said.

In the four-party alliance meeting last night it was decided BNP will tell the president that no Election Commission will be able to work neutrally under a partisan government, no matter how much strengthened the commission is.

It was also decided that BNP will create a draft of the proposals and distribute it among its alliance partners before finalising it, so that a united voice of the alliance is heard at the talks, meeting sources said.

"It was decided that BNP will request the president to invite Jamaat-e-Islami to the talks as well, since it is also a political party registered with the EC, and has representation in the parliament," Abdul Latif Nezami, secretary general of IOJ, told The Daily Star last night.

BNP had earlier raised questions about the "motive" of the president's talks, with some of its senior leaders voicing opposition to joining the talks.

change of heart now, Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir said, "We still have the old demands, but we've now decided to place it to the president in person during the dialogue."

"You will know more about the reasons after we return from the talks," he added.

Nezami said BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, who chaired last night's four-party alliance meeting, was for joining the dialogue because the invitation came from the country's president which is the highest constitutional post.

YESTERDAY'S TALKS
Meanwhile, the president yesterday told two separate delegations of Workers Party and Jatiya Party-JP that he will ask the government to enact a law in line with the constitution that will require formation of a "search committee" to find appropriate persons from among whom the chief election commissioner and the other election commissioners will be appointed.

While holding talks with WP, a component of AL-led grand alliance, and Jatiya Party-JP at Bangabhaban, the president however said enacting the proposed law is a time consuming matter, meeting sources said.

Rahman urged the leaders of the two parties to submit names of "honest, patriotic, competent and democratic minded" persons to him, who could be appointed as the CEC and other election commissioners.

"We proposed to enact a law in line with our constitution under which a search committee will be formed. The committee will find competent and honest persons and will place their names before the parliament's Business Advisory Committee, which will create a short list and submit it to the president," Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon told reporters emerging from the hour long talks.

The eight-member delegation of the party also told the president that though the constitution directs to enact a law regarding formation of the EC, it has not been enacted in the past 40 years.

"We've told the president about the significance of enacting the law," Menon said.

"We also told the president that since enacting the law will require time and the parliament is not in session now, the government could promulgate an ordinance to that effect for now," he added.

the president that they will submit a list of names of "competent and patriotic" people to him at a later time.

Led by its Chairman Anwar Hossain Manju, the twelve-member Jatiya Party-JP delegation told the president that they will also submit some names later.

But they also told the president that he should, for now, go ahead and form the next EC by himself on consultation with the prime minister.

On Thursday the president held the first round of talks with HM Ershad-led Jatiya Party, and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal. He sought names from them also.

On expiry of the tenure of the present EC in early February, the president, on advice of the prime minister, will have to appoint a chief election commissioner and other election commissioners to form the new EC.

Against such a backdrop, the president started the talks with political parties on Thursday, seeking their opinions on the matter.

TODAY'S TALKS
Liberal Democratic Party is scheduled to join the dialogue at Bangabhaban at 11:00am today.

independent Election Commission, initiating a search committee for having a new EC in place, and enacting a law to this end.

Responding to his concerns, the prime minister said the president had taken a good initiative to form the EC in consultation with political parties. "This will ensure the participation of all political parties in the formation of the Election Commission, the prime minister said.

About corruption, The Daily Star editor said though some ministers were known for their honesty, overall corruption was alarming in the country.

The Samakal publisher highly praised the prime minister on the positive performance of her government, particularly in relation to the rise in tax revenue. He expressed concerns, though, over the large-scale bank borrowing and said the banks were not opening LCs in many cases.

The News Today editor said the government should do everything possible to ensure the participation of all major political parties in the next parliamentary elections.

Party insiders said Oli Ahmed on Sunday met BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia in her Gulshan office to talk about the dialogue.

The Communist Party of Bangladesh is also set to join the dialogue at 12 noon today.

13 found slain in truck in Mexico

AFP, Nuevo Laredo

Troops made a grisly Christmas discovery in northeastern Mexico when they found 13 bodies in a truck, seen as the latest explosion of violence in the battle between warring drug cartels.

Soldiers found two messages at the scene in Tamaulipas state "alluding to the rivalry between criminal groups" in the northeast, the Department of Justice said in a statement overnight into yesterday.

Investigators say the murders are linked to Friday's discovery of 10 bodies in the town of Tampico Alto, in neighboring Veracruz state, and attacks by gunmen last week on three buses that left 16 people dead.