

Speaker

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Speaker said in his welcome address at the New Year session of the House that began yesterday amid boycott by lawmakers of the BNP-led opposition. Active participation of the lawmakers in parliamentary proceedings can take it to the peak of success, and acceptance of this truth is the main driving force of democracy, Hamid said. There may be difference of opinion in politics but one has to give importance to others' views for the sake of national interests, he added.

"Parliament is the heart of politics. Parliament is for the people. Parliament is the focal point of all activities for meeting the people's expectations and demands," the Speaker observed.

The speaker urged the opposition MPs to join the parliament session. He hoped the ruling alliance and opposition MPs will get rid of past failures and obstacles, and join the efforts for betterment of the people and the country.

In his brief speech, Hamid mentioned that the ninth parliament had 254 sittings in the last three years. It passed 153 bills, and people are benefiting from those.

Besides, 225 MPs in 113 parliamentary delegations participated in workshops, seminars and conferences abroad, he said.

OBITUARY MOTION
At the beginning of its session, the House made an obituary reference on the death of Awami League lawmaker Abdur Razzak and some other eminent citizens of the country.

Participating in the condolence motion, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina briefly narrated the heroic contribution of AL leader Razzak in the Liberation War and in organising the party.

He played a significant role during the war and also later, the premier said.

Twelve MPs including Amir Hossain Amu, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim and Tafaik Ahmed spoke on the motion.

Razzak was a truly patriotic leader. Love for the people and the country was the motto of his life, they said.

The House adopted the condolence motion. It was then adjourned for Maghrib prayers.

Razzak died on December 24 last ending a 50-year illustrious career in politics.

Aggreko
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severe financial pressure by importing diesel, it had asked Aggreko last year whether it could convert its diesel-based plant into a gas-fired one. The company agreed and started conversion works accordingly.

"As of today, Aggreko has already converted one part of the plant and is generating 45 MW of power using natural gas," said an official.

"We hope, the full conversion will be completed by the end of February," the official added.

Yesterday, PDB and Aggreko officials signed the amendment. As per the amendment, the power tariff -- minus the fuel cost -- remains the same at Tk 4.80 per kilowatt-hour. The contract will expire on August 2013.

Aggreko runs several rental power plants generating 395 MW of electricity in total. Of this, 150 MW is being produced from gas.

The government opted for diesel and heavy fuel oil-fired rental plants from 2007 due to severe power shortage and gas crisis.

The installation and dismantling process of rental plants are ideally easy while they charge a bit higher for power generation.

Other than Aggreko, three other local companies are generating 200 MW of power using natural gas.

Due to the operation of fuel-based rental plants, the government's fuel oil import has doubled in 2011 -- putting heavy pressure on the economy.

President warns

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that democratic process cannot be desirable for any of us," said the president.

Zillur also called upon opposition lawmakers, who were absent in the House yesterday, to place all their proposals, recommendations and complaints in the Jatiya Sangsad.

"Democracy will be enriched in that way."

He said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had repeatedly urged the opposition lawmakers to discharge their responsibilities as people's representatives by joining the Jatiya Sangsad.

"Opinion of the opposition was sought in all instances, including the amendment to the constitution, both inside and outside the House," he said.

"But it is very frustrating that the opposition is not showing a positive attitude about taking part in parliamentary deliberations. Democracy is a dynamic process. And the discharge of responsibilities reposed by the people is more important than an indulgence in political conflicts."

The president strongly criticised the rule of the BNP-Jamaat alliance and the last caretaker government.

He said the present government had to face many problems after it came to power against the backdrop of disorder in socio-economic and political life.

The misuse and corruption of the post-2001 governments pushed the economy to the verge of collapse, and had shaken democratic institutions and governance. Transparency and accountability in government activities were absent, and the country's politics was in chaos, said Zillur.

After coming to power, the government had been making tireless efforts to strengthen democracy and the rule of law, and attain economic prosperity.

In the synopsis of his 132-page speech, the president portrayed a rosy picture of Bangladesh, and gave out details of the successes of the present government.

He said the characteristics of a true democratic government are transparency, accountability, openness, tolerance and faith in human rights and the rule of law and a relentless pursuit of sustainable socio-economic growth.

"Considering these criteria, the government's role in the past three years has been undoubtedly praiseworthy and positive," said the president.

Lawmakers of the Treasury Bench welcomed his speech by thumping desks. A 40-hour discussion on a thanks giving motion on the speech will begin in the House on Sunday.

Rickshaw

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Ignoring illness caused by her pregnancy, Rashida used to leave home every day to earn a livelihood and to have some savings for her soon-to-arrive baby.

All of her dreams centring on her babies and her family were blown to pieces yesterday when a rickshaw ran her over in the city's Azimpur area yesterday morning.

Rashida, wife of Mohammad Akram Sheikh, a rickshaw repairer who lives at Labagh Member Lane, collapsed on the ground as two rickshaws hit her in front of Sir Salimullah Orphanage at around 7:30pm, said witnesses.

Her colleagues and local people took her to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where doctors declared her dead.

Her colleague Aklima Begum, who witnessed the incident, told reporters at DMCH that Rashida and some of her colleagues had been going to their workplace, Starlight Garments, in Gausia Market area.

When they reached the orphanage, Rashida told them that she could walk no longer. She told her colleagues that she would board a bus to go to her workplace.

As she waited at a bus stop, a bus ran very close to her. When she went a few steps back, a rickshaw hit her. When she stumbled another rickshaw hit her and she fell on the ground, receiving injuries on her head and abdomen.

Akram Sheikh, an employee of a roadside rickshaw repairing shop in Azimpur, told reporters and

police that their only child Al Amin is a student of class five at a local primary school.

Akram said he was unable to bear family expenses out of his income, and his wife, who was a sewing operator at the garment factory, did not stop working despite her pain.

The victim's neighbours said Rashida had desired a girl child for a long time but because of financial inability she did not conceive. After about 11 years of her son's birth, she thought that it was the right time to get a second child and asked everyone around her to pray to God so she would get a baby girl.

Some women living in adjacent houses said Rashida had been saving money so she could take leave from work when the new baby was born and to take good care of the baby. They said they had passed many good times with Rashida when she told them how she wanted to raise her children and ensure their good future.

But now with her demise, all her dreams and wishes were buried.

Mir Sabbir Ali, sub-inspector of Labagh Police Station said local people could not nab the two rickshaws which hit Rashida as they could not identify the three-wheelers.

None has been arrested in this connection.

Rashida's family did not agree to file any case and they took away the body without an autopsy as the woman was pregnant.

DMCH sources said there were swelling marks on the head and abdomen of the body.

Why duty-free car

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The rights body chief urged all political parties represented in parliament to join the House and forge unity against any attempt to seize the state power illegally.

"Joining the House, all the lawmakers should declare themselves as pro-democratic force and form unity to resist any anti-democratic force," he mentioned.

Criticising a section of public servants, Mizanur said many physicians at government hospitals do not offer proper treatment to poor people and they even pay bribes to cancel their transfer orders to rural areas.

He also stressed the importance of curbing corruption to ensure rule of law, good governance and better services for the people.

Urging Transparency International Bangladesh not to brand the country a corrupt state, he said, "Some people are corrupt here, not the country itself. So don't insult the state for only a few corrupts."

Presiding over the session, Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) Chairman Dr Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad suggested maximum utilisation of national resources to make public service sectors more effective.

He also proposed formation of farmers' union to ensure fair prices of their produce.

Shawkat Momen Shahjahan, president of the parliamentary standing committee on agriculture ministry, recommended raising the freedom fighters' monthly allowance to Tk 5,000 from Tk 2,000.

Noted economist MM Akash demanded increased subsidy and facilities to the marginal farmers and urged the government to monitor the process closely to ensure the farmers are benefited.

Governance Coalition coordinator Mohsin Ali and Oxfam's Bangladesh Country Director Gareth Price-Jones also spoke at the function.

The convention ended with adopting a 20-point demand to be placed to the government to protect citizen's rights and improve public services.

The demands include preparation of an accurate database of the ultra-poor, appointment and proper training of health service providers in rural areas, introduction of health card, formulation of health policy and implementation of all the social safety net projects.

Suspend two errant OCs

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The inspector general of police has to initiate departmental proceedings to consider suspension of Syed Nazrul Islam, OC of Araihaaz Police Station in Narayanganj and OC Rabiul Islam of Bakerganj Police Station in Barisal, if such action is necessary for fair investigation, the court said.

The High Court bench of Justice AHM Shamsuddin Choudhury Manik and Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim passed the orders during the hearing on two separate rules earlier issued by it regarding the incidents.

Deputy Attorney General ABM Altaf Hossain told The Daily Star that he has already informed the IGP of the High Court orders.

INCIDENT IN NARAYANGANJ
Four to five people led by Shahjahan, son of Abdur Rahim, from Aguanid village of Mahmudpur union of Araihaaz upazila, kidnapped and raped a 14-year-old girl tying her mother up on the night of January 19.

The daily Prothom Alo published a report on the incident on January 24 saying that OC Syed Nazrul Islam did not file any case and did not take any action against the suspects even four days after the incident.

Syed Nazrul Islam said he had heard about the inci-

dent, the report said, adding that the victim was admitted to Narayanganj Victoria Hospital.

Following the report, the High Court summoned Nazrul Islam and Sub-Inspector of Araihaaz Police Station Nazmul Huda yesterday to hear their explanations about their actions.

Appearing before the court yesterday, Nazrul Islam said he did not take any action against the incident since he was not informed of the incident before three days had gone.

SI Nazmul Huda, however, told the court that he visited the spot and informed Nazrul of the matter around 5:00am on January 20 over the mobile phone.

Justice Manik then asked Nazrul and Nazmul which one of them was telling the truth. Nazrul then admitted that he received the phone call from Nazmul but he was sick and could not take any step.

Justice Manik rebuked the OC saying he was lying and he should be punished for his negligence in duty, which resulted in evidence being damaged.

The judge said the OC not only harmed the family of the victim, the nation and society but also damaged the image of the whole

police administration.

The court asked the superintendent of police of Narayanganj to protect the victim's family members.

INCIDENT IN BARISAL
A school student of Bakerganj upazila in Barisal committed suicide on October 21 last year after she was raped by a group of criminals of her village on October 13.

When her parents went to the police station to file a rape case police recorded it as an abduction case instead of a rape case, according to a report published in the daily Prothom Alo.

Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh filed a writ petition in this regard on October 23 and its president Manzil Mushrid appeared before the court seeking necessary orders against the people responsible for the death of the student.

After a court order, Additional Inspector General of Police of Barisal Range Vanu Lal Das investigated the incident and submitted the report before the court on January 24.

The report said OC Rabiul Islam had neglected his duty of protecting the girl's honour. Had the OC taken action against the culprits, the girl would not have committed suicide, the report said.

City schools

FROM PAGE 1
Many also criticised the government and the Monipur High School and College authorities for dropping lawmaker Kamal Ahmed Majumder's name from the probe report on the assault of a woman journalist of the private television channel Rtv.

"It took Tk 25,400 to have my daughter admitted to Monipur School. The school also sold admission forms at Tk 600 each," said a parent, who asked when and how guardians could expect to have a refund.

Another guardian of a student of the same school said the institution took Tk 32,000 to enrol her daughter in class-I (English version) while the monthly fee is Tk 2,000.

Nasirullah Nahid, a student from Khulna who could not get admitted in a reputed school despite doing well in the last Junior School Certificate exams, asked whether students like him would never have the chance to study in reputed schools due to their not being able to pay exorbitant fees.

The minister said the reputed schools were charging extra fees in the name of development, session charge and other fees. Without mentioning the name, he said a school had made Tk 4.42 crore from admission and other charges this year.

"We cannot get rid of this problem unless standard education is ensured in all the institutions. We are striving to do that," said Nahid, adding that the issue of charging higher admission fees was nothing new in the country.

He said since there were few good educational institutions, most parents felt eager to get their children admitted in them, thus leading to a huge competition. And thence come some people in the play to take advantage of the situation, the education minister added.

"We have got a report from the committee working on admission fees and will take action against the rule-breakers as per law," he said.

Aporna Singha, staff reporter of Rtv, who was assaulted by lawmaker Kamal Majumder, asked the minister how long the ministry would keep repeating the cliché "taking action or will take action" as most students have already got admitted by paying the extra money.

The minister in reply said there was no negligence in the part of the authorities about the issue and they would definitely take action.

Only a few days ago, the enquiry committee on monitoring school admissions in its report found that 24 out of 32 prominent non-government schools in the capital charged fees much higher than the amount fixed in the admission policy.

Monipur High School and College, Viharunniha Noon School and College, Motijheel Ideal School and Motijheel Model School are among the schools that charged high fees.

The committee recommended refunding the extra money to the parents and guardians.

The admission fee issue came under the spotlight following media reports that most of the prominent schools in the capital had been violating the admission policy by charging extra money. The extra amount ranged between Tk 7,000 and Tk 26,000 for class-I, whereas the policy states

that schools in Dhaka city must not charge more than Tk 5,000 for admission and session charges.

But things turned ugly on January 3, when ruling Awami League lawmaker Kamal Ahmed Majumder assaulted Aporna Singha when she went to Monipur School to prepare a report on extra admission fees being charged by the school. The lawmaker heads the school managing committee.

Yesterday, the education minister said the authorities could review the admission fees for private schools which had been fixed in consultation with teachers, parents and officials concerned.

Stating that political economy was involved with the admission trade, Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, proposed the formulation of a law to ensure that no political leader could be involved with any school and no politician could be the head of any school management committee.

Rehman Sobhan, chairman of Centre for Policy Dialogue, said almost all the lawmakers' children study in English medium schools and so it should be analysed whether a lawmaker had any interest in the school he was leading.

He proposed keeping 25 to 30 percent seats in cadet colleges for general students.

The speakers also demanded more allocation in the education sector to ensure education for all and quality teaching in schools.

"We have seen a rise in the budgetary allocation for defence but not for education, which is depressing," said Rasheda K Chowdhury, Campe executive director.

Psychologist Mehtab Khanam stressed the need for changing the mindset of guardians who compete to send their children to so-called good schools just to get good results but not for overall development of a child.

Farah Kabir, country director of ActionAid, demanded that the schools publish their annual audit in the public domain.

Human rights activist Sultana Kamal said education was not a matter of business, but nowadays schools and colleges were being established for profit.

Hossain Zillur Rahman, former education adviser to the last caretaker government, said problems with admission would not be resolved until a long-term agenda to turn all schools into good schools was taken.

NBR to use EC's database

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"But there are instances we have given TIN on the basis of fake photocopies. Now the agreement will help us crosscheck information directly, which will reduce the number of TIN in the country," Mohasin told The Daily Star.

"We have initiated the move so that people cannot obtain fake TIN. It will also help correct our own database and help us in tax collection," he said.

Under the deal, the NBR will be able to directly verify information of an applicant seeking TIN from the EC database for the next 10 years.

There are 2.6 million TIN-holders in the country, but only 0.9 million pay tax now, according to the NBR. The EC has a database of 8.6 crore voters.

At the agreement signing ceremony, Chief Election Commissioner ATM Shamsul Huda said several organisations in the country have already started using the national ID cards before taking any decision.

"So, we have taken steps to develop software to examine the database online. Now we are fully prepared," he

said, adding that verification of the national ID cards is essential to provide any service.

NBR Chairman Nasiruddin Ahmed said the NBR not only collects revenue but also provides various services through certification of TIN.

"It has been difficult for the NBR to identify the genuine taxpayers as there are many TIN-holders in the country," he said.

Income tax is the second biggest source of revenue after the value added tax.

Experts however say the impact of the initiative might not be too significant.

"It will give opportunities to NBR to crosscheck information," said AB Mirza Azizul Islam, a former caretaker government adviser.

"However, the EC did not verify information when its database was prepared. It has included in the database whatever information was given by an individual."

Islam also said the NBR should do its own work rather than relying on other agencies. "It is their responsibility to collect information about a taxpayer. But we do not see much activities on part of them other than

conducting some surveys," he told The Daily Star over phone.

He added the NBR should first try to ensure 100 percent tax return submission of all TIN-holders.

An NBR official said the move might not bring a revolutionary result but will give benefit in the long run. "It was long overdue," he commented.

Asked about the authenticity of the national ID database, Alam said: "We are working considering the database ideal. The same database is being used in elections and also for issuing passports or opening bank accounts. So, it has acceptability and its use is increasing."

He said the NBR does not have that kind of logistics to conduct inspection on its own to crosscheck information. "We cannot go door to door. People come to our office, submit some documents and we give the TIN."

Election commissioners M Sohul Hossain and M Sakhat Hossain and NBR members MA Quader Sarker and Md Farid Uddin were present during the agreement signing ceremony.

Parties asked

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system before formation of a new Election Commission (EC).

The committee meeting was held, two days after its formation on Sunday, in the conference room of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court (SC) headed by its Chairman Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain of the Appellate Division.

Two other members of the committee, High Court Division Justice Mohammad Nuruzzaman and Public Service Commission Chairman ATM Ahmedul Haque Chowdhury, were also present. Another member, Comptroller and Auditor General Ahmed Ataul Hakeem, is currently abroad.

The committee, which had been asked to place its recommendations to the president within 10 working days since its formation, finalised a module to collect the names of recommended persons.

"As the time is very short, we won't send any letter to the parties. Rather we are urging the parties through the media that they send the names immediately," Cabinet Secretary M Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan told The Daily Star after the meeting.

The search committee will recommend two names for each post in the EC based on the majority votes in the committee. In case of a tie, the committee chief will cast the deciding vote. The tenure of the present EC will expire in mid-February.

The president held dialogues with 24 political parties

from December 22 last year to January 12 this year seeking their opinions about reconstitution of the EC. Many political parties proposed constituting a search committee to form the new EC while some others including BNP demanded restoration of the caretaker government system first. After the dialogues BNP rejected the search committee.

A handout from the Press Information Department said the cabinet secretary and the SC registrar were also requested to provide lists of all retired cabinet and principal secretaries, and retired district judges.

Yesterday's meeting also decided that the search committee members individually will recommend eligible persons of their choice as well, said the handout.

If each political party sends names of five persons, that will be 120 names, and the cabinet secretary, SC registrar, and the committee members will recommend some more names. From the recommended persons a maximum of four will be made election commissioners and one chief election commissioner.

Ruling AL will sit shortly to discuss the matter.

"We will first sit with the party president also prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, and then decide on the matter," AL Presidium Member and Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury told The Daily Star yesterday.

BNP Standing Committee Member MK Anwar said if they receive any formal letter from

the committee they will give a reply.

He however said the issue of the caretaker government system must be resolved first, otherwise the EC will not be able to work independently under a political government.

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon said they will send their recommendations after consulting the matter in the party.

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Clash kills 23 troops, Taliban in Pakistan
AFP, Peshawar

Six Pakistani soldiers and 17 Taliban militants were killed in an overnight clash in a northwestern tribal district near the Afghan border, officials said yesterday.

Some 50 Taliban fighters attacked Pakistani troops during a search operation in Jogi village of central Kurram tribal district late Tuesday, officials said.

"Six soldiers were killed and four injured in the clash. Troops repelled the attack and killed 17 militants," Sher Bahadar Khan, a local government official in Kurram told AFP.

The militants were Pakistani Taliban, he said. Troops are still engaged in a search and cordon operation after clearing most of the area.

Nizami

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haven't I [Nizami] informed the prime minister and home minister about the matter?" Shoeb said quoting Nizami.

The former industries secretary also said that when he informed Nizami about newspaper reports involving the ministry of industries with the arms haul incident, and requested him to conduct an investigation, Nizami replied that law enforcement agencies are probing the matter.

The industries ministry need not launch an investigation separately, Nizami added.

When the defence lawyer asked Shoeb whether the minister gave any written instructions on the matter, he replied if the minister concerned says that he conveyed the information to the prime minister what else a secretary can do.

Earlier, the defence lawyer cross-examined Shoeb.

During the cross-examination, Shoeb told the court that he directed the then BCIC chairman to give a detailed report on the whole incident immediately on April 2.

The BCIC chairman could not submit the report on April 2 and April 3 as those were Friday and Saturday--the government holidays.

The BCIC chairman told him that he would inform him about the whole matter on Sunday, Shoeb said.

The court recorded the depositions of Shoeb till 5:00pm.

Witness dies
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Crimes Tribunal against Sayeede in connection with the crimes against humanity during the Liberation War.

Investigation agency sources said Bashudeb died due to heart diseases. He hailed from Chithalia village in Pirojpur, the village home of Sayeede.

In his deposition, Bashudeb told the tribunal that Sayeede ordered a group of collaborators to torch the house of Manik Poshari, another witness in the case, at Chithalia.

"Tora ghor-duare agun dhoraiya de [set fire to the houses]," was Sayeede's order, according to Bashudeb.