

BNP beaming

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party's mass procession programme, Moudud Ahmed, another member of the committee, said the government was basically defeated on January 29.

The BNP was scheduled to bring out mass processions on Sunday (January 29) across the country, but the government imposed a ban on rallies and gatherings in Dhaka and other metropolitan cities for Sunday. On January 26, the ruling party's city unit called a rally for January 29, which also created tension in the political arena.

Complying with the ban, the BNP rescheduled its procession programme to Monday (January 30). For its part, the Awami League also postponed its rally.

Interestingly, the ruling party once again called a rally for Monday, with the pro-Awami League youth organisation Juba League announcing a human chain for the day.

The BNP on Sunday brought out processions in all districts since there was no ban on processions there. But police resorted to gunfire on the processions in Chandpur and Laxmipur that left four people dead. On Monday, a Jamaat-e-Islami man was killed in Rajshahi during a clash with police.

The situation went against the government when police fired on opposition processions and obstructed scheduled processions in the cities by imposing bans, observed BNP high-ups who did not wish to be named.

"In fact, the last few days' events reflect the government's overall failure to run the country. So, it is natural people's support will come towards us," RA Gani, senior member of the BNP standing committee, told The Daily Star.

He said it seemed that the government was deliberately trying to trigger a conflict, "but people do not like it and that is why everything, whatever the Awami League did in the last couple of days went against the Awami League".

"They [the ruling party] wanted to foil our mass processions but people rejected the attempt by making the programme successful across the country," he said. He noted that the people appreciated the BNP's decision to defer the date for bringing out the processions while the Awami League was highly criticised for coming forward with programmes to counter the opposition.

2 ex-BCL leaders

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president and general secretary, hired a female performer to dance at a cultural function organised by them to celebrate BCL's 64th anniversary on January 4.

The 19-year-old dance artiste filed a case the following day with Sathkira Sadar Police Station against the duo for violating her after confining her overnight in a house at Katia area in Sathkira.

Amid a nationwide criticism of the incident, BCL central committee dissolved its Sathkira district unit on January 5.

Police arrested Palash on January 5 but Jewel is still in hiding.

DCC polls

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while its schedule can be announced in the middle of April", he said.

The current commission's tenure expires early next month.

The election commission opined that the polls to both DCC North and DCC South should be held on the same day.

Ignoring widespread criticism and protests, the parliament on November 29 last year, passed a bill to split the DCC into two and made a provision for holding the polls in the next 90 days.

However, the EC declined to hold the polls as its tenure expires in early February.

Taking the situation into consideration, the cabinet on Monday approved a proposal to amend the Local Government (City Corporation) Act, 2009 to extend the timeframe for holding the polls by 90 more days.

The extension implies that the polls would be held by May this year.

Bangla or Urdu?

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before India was partitioned by the British colonial administration into two independent states, several leading Muslim scholars rather inexplicably suggested that Urdu be the lingua franca of the new state. That view was, however, opposed by reputed Bangalee scholars, whose view was that since the Bangalees of Pakistan's eastern wing would constitute the majority segment of the country's population, it was only proper that Bangla be adopted as the language of the state. For his part, Dr Muhammad Shahidullah, writing in the daily Azad published from Calcutta, stated that having Urdu as the only language of the state and pushing Bangla into the sidelines would only undermine the interests of the Bangalees of Pakistan.

The demand for Bangla as the state language of Pakistan received a boost when Abdul Haq put forward some strong arguments in its favour through published articles in June and July 1947. And then came the weekly Millat, edited by Abul Mansur Ahmed, where the logic behind Bangla being the language of the Pakistan state was put across editorially. Similar arguments in favour of Bangla were making it clear that while the Bangalees were prepared to accept Pakistan as a country for themselves, they remained focused too on the thought that their cultural traditions could not be trifled with. Abul Hashim spoke loud and clear, through the election manifesto of the Muslim League in 1946, on the issue of Bangla being the language of the state that was about to come into existence. In July 1947, the Gono Azad League struck a similar posture.

Once Pakistan came into being on 14 August 1947, a rising crescendo of voices added new force to the demand for Bangla as Pakistan's lingua franca.

Indian minister

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Hasina and meet his Bangladeshi counterpart Dipu Moni in the first high-level meeting between the two nations since Indian premier Manmohan Singh's visit to Dhaka in September last year, sources said yesterday.

Krishna is to convey to Bangladesh that India is hopeful of overcoming the political complexities that have clouded the implementation of two key decisions -- the Teesta river water-sharing agreement and ratification of the agreement on exchange of adversely held enclaves and land boundary demarcation.

The West Bengal state government headed by Mamata Banerjee has opposed signing the treaty on water sharing and voiced reservations against exchange of the enclaves falling in the state.

The main purpose of Krishna's visit is to reassure the Bangladeshi leadership

The position of the Tamaddun Majlish was unambiguous. With its founder Abul Kashem taking the lead, the organization had a collection of articles putting across the case for Bangla compiled in the form of a booklet called Rashtr Bhasha Bangla Na Urdu? Among the more prominent contributors to the compilation were Abul Mansur Ahmed and Professor Quazi Motahar Hossain.

SSC exams

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students will appear in this year's SSC and equivalent examinations at 2,464 centres.

Some 10.52 lakh students will take the SSC exams under eight general education boards while some 2.75 lakh students will appear in Dakhil (secondary level of madrasa) examinations and around 91,158 in SSC vocational exams.

Dhaka Board has the highest number of examinees with 3.24 lakh candidates while Sylhet Board has the lowest with 58,500.

The examinations kick-off today with Bangla 1st paper for the candidates of SSC and SSC vocational exams and while Dakhil candidates will appear for their one and only Bangla exam.

All papers except Bangla 2nd, English 1st and 2nd, and mathematics of SSC general exams will be held under the creative question method introduced in 2010.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid will visit Dhanmondi Government Boys' High School centre today.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) imposed a ban on movement of people, except examinees, within 200 yards of examination centres in the city during the examinations, said a DMP statement.

The restrictions will remain in force during the examination hours on the examination days, it added.

that efforts are well underway to forge a consensus in India on the two issues.

There has been disappointment and disquiet in Bangladesh over the stalemate on these two issues and the reported objections of Trinamool Congress to them.

Krishna will contend during his visit that although the Congress-led UPA government can - under the Constitution - assert its authority to go ahead unilaterally on foreign policy issues, but since it has a coalition government, it would like to proceed on the basis of a consensus by all coalition partners, sources said.

The external affairs minister is expected to impress on Dhaka that the process of evolving a consensus in a coalition government like in India takes time. He will be reassuring his counterparts that this should not give rise to misgivings about India's intentions.

Power tariff

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last year, BERC increased the average retail electricity tariff by 5 percent.

Customers, however, will be charged different power prices as the country's five power suppliers maintain different tariffs for different groups.

Customers of Power Development Board, the country's lone buyer of electricity from generation companies, will pay 6.74 percent more from today.

Rural Electrification Board's customers, who pay more than their urban peers, will see their electricity bills increase by 6.58 percent this time.

Dhaka Electricity Supply Company (Desco) will charge its customers 7.44 percent more from today.

Distribution Company (DPDC) will have to pay 7.76 percent more, while West Zone Power Distribution Company (WZPDCO) will charge its customers 12.94 percent more from today.

Despite the tariff increase, only Desco will make profit among all distributors. WZPDCO will reach the break-even point and DPDC has the potential to overcome Tk 8 crore in losses if it works hard, said Haque of BERC earlier.

BERC officials said the increase in electricity price would help the government save about Tk 1,000 crore in annual subsidies on energy. The country pays a huge amount of money as energy subsidies, contributing to rising inflation and higher bank borrowing.

Mustaq

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replace Mustaq, according to a gazette notification of the public administration ministry.

The changes became inevitable after the status of inspector general of police (IGP) was enhanced to the rank of senior secretary while Manzur has been holding the top administrative post at the home ministry, under which is the police department.

The government recently elevated the rank of eight secretaries, including CQK Mustak, to senior secretary.

In another move, Mikail Shipar, director general of Prime Minister's Office, has been made acting secretary of the labour ministry while Kazi Akhter Hossain, additional secretary of the agriculture ministry, has been reassigned as the chairman of the Land Appeals Board.

Kamaruzzaman

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Kamaruzzaman operated in Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Tangail and Sherpur areas during the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971, according to the charges.

The three-judge tribunal headed by Justice Md Nizamul Huq yesterday directed prosecution to submit copies of the formal charges against Kamaruzzaman and other relevant documents to the tribunal's registrar by February 6.

It also asked defence to collect copies of the charges from the registrar's office on February 7 so that it could prepare for the legal battle.

The court said it had taken the charges against the Jamaat leader into cognisance after examining the formal charges, probe reports and documents submitted by the prosecution and seeing enough preliminary evidence for a trial.

On December 28 last year, the tribunal sent the formal charge against Kamaruzzaman back to prosecution as the charges were not classified and organised properly.

After the court passed the order yesterday, Prosecutor AKM Saiful Islam told reporters that Kamaruzzaman, chief organiser of Al Badr Bahini (collaborators' force), was in charge of executing the plan of the Pakistani armed forces' operation Search Light on the night of March 25, 1971.

Kamaruzzaman personally took part in operations at many places during the Liberation War, he said.

Defence counsel Tajul Islam told reporters the case had been filed against Kamaruzzaman in order to harass him. He was not, said the lawyer, involved in any crimes against humanity committed during 1971.

Kamaruzzaman is among six Jamaat leaders, including its former chief Ghulam Azam and two BNP leaders, facing war crimes charges before the court. All of them have been arrested and one of them is on bail.

Railway

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stock) of BR and VK Jain, executive director of RITES Ltd signed the deal at the Railway Bhawan in the capital.

Railways Minister Suranjit Sengupta, Railways Secretary Fazle Kabir and the acting Indian High Commissioner Sanjay Bhattacharya were also present at the ceremony.

"We want to procure the locomotives as soon as possible to strengthen our railway sector," Suranjit said while speaking on the occasion.

He also urged the Indian company to provide the engines in the stipulated time.

Last October, BR struck a deal with Japan's Marubeni Corporation to procure 11 metre-gauge locomotives costing Tk 439 crore by April 2013.

Of the total cost, Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica) will provide Tk 307 crore, while the rest will be borne by the public exchequer.

Hyundai Rotem, a South Korean company will manufacture the locomotives.

Earlier, in July last year, BR signed another deal under which 165 oil tank wagons will be procured from Texmaco Ltd, India by the end of 2012.

'Dark shadow'

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take necessary steps for the national economy ... We inform them about the steps we are taking," Muhith said.

"When I [as finance minister] talk on various issues, people from different quarters criticise me, saying I talk too much. But what I say is necessary."

The finance minister also said the volume of import in the current fiscal year is on the rise exceeding the government target, affecting the value of the local currency.

During the question hour, ruling Awami League lawmaker KM Khalid called upon the government to release the US dollars, reserved at Bangladesh Bank, to the local market in a bid to increase the value of the local currency against the dollar and fight the shortage of the greenback.

In response, Muhith said the government was always considering the issue and looking for ways to do this.

Replying to another query, he said Bangladesh was not getting foreign investment in the desired sectors, which is one of the major weaknesses of its economy.

He said the four percent growth rate in the agriculture and sector in the last several years has played a significant role in the sustenance of the national economy.

Meanwhile, the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) yesterday urged the political parties to bring about stability through doing away with the "confrontational" political situation. He stressed maintaining a congenial atmosphere for business activities and attracting foreign

investments.

"Media in the countries competing with us prominently display the pictures of people lying dead on the streets and also report that there is no congenial environment for investment in Bangladesh," said AK Azad, president of the apex business body.

"Investment will face a setback if there is no stable political situation in the country. As a result, no local businesses will invest, let alone foreign investors," he said, adding the confrontational political situation will affect the growth of gross domestic product (GDP).

The top business leader made the remarks at the concluding ceremony of the month-long 17th Dhaka International Trade Fair at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the capital.

His remarks came a day after the killing of an activist of Jamaat-e-Islami in police firing during clashes between the law enforcers and Jamaat men in Rajshahi. And four people died in Laxmipur and Chandpur towns on Sunday when police fired on demonstrating BNP activists and supporters.

Commerce Minister Ghulam Muhammad Quader, who was the chief guest at the ceremony, differed with the FBCCI chief. He said he does not think that the economy will face a crisis due to the political crisis. "Rather, the political crisis could deepen if an economic crisis surfaces."

Azad also said political instability has added to the economic volatility.

He suggested the government should expedite the resumption of gas and electricity connections as

many factories are lying idle without utility services.

"We have set up factories and installed machinery. We have deposited money with government agencies for (gas and electricity) connections. But we are not being able to go for production as we do not get the connection."

The high cost of funds has added another dimension to the piles of barriers they are facing, Azad mentioned.

Air raids on Qaeda bases in Yemen kill 15

AFP, Aden

Air raids struck al-Qaeda elements in southern Yemen overnight and killed 15 people, including a long-hunted militant leader, tribal chiefs said, adding that extremists responded by killing two soldiers yesterday.

The four Monday night raids were "carried out by US planes," according to a local military official who spoke on condition of anonymity. They hit targets in the Loder and Al-Wadhi areas of Abyan province, a tribal chief said.

Al-Qaeda militants control much of the province after taking advantage of months of political turmoil, which has forced President Ali Abdullah Saleh to agree to step down next month, to overrun swathes of the south.

Three of the raids targeted a school in which al-Qaeda fighters and chiefs of a local militant network were meeting around midnight, the sources said.

AL, 2 other parties

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Election Commission. It was formed after dialogues between President Zillur Rahman and the political parties. The committee had asked each political party to recommend five people for the positions of election commissioner in the EC.

"We have received names from some parties and hope to sort them out in the next three days," Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) Ahmed Ataul Hakeem, also a member of the search committee, told reporters after a meeting at the office of the Appellate Division judge yesterday evening.

He declined to make any further comments. The four-member committee had urged the political

parties to recommend the names by January 29 but later extended the time to yesterday.

The Awami League, Workers' Party and Jatiya Party (JP-Manju) have sent names to the committee.

Awami League General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam and Workers' Party President Rashed Khan Menon confirmed to The Daily Star that they had sent the names but declined to disclose any name.

Jatiya Party (JP) Chairman HM Ershad did not send the names until yesterday afternoon, as he was in a dilemma regarding whom to choose.

The main opposition BNP, which rejected the search committee since its formation, did not send any name. A

few other parties adopted a similar position.

Manzurul Ahsan Khan, President of Communist Party of Bangladesh, said his party would not recommend names to the search committee. The leaders of Gono Forum and Islami Andolan Bangladesh had similar responses on the issue.

Earlier, the president asked the committee to place its recommendations for constituting the Election Commission within 10 working days from its formation.

The search committee will recommend to the president two names for each position of election commissioner.

The tenure of the current commission expires this month.

Individual visas

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employer. If the number of jobseekers exceeds eight, they will fly on group visas.

The ministry says as the Bangladesh missions don't attest job documents, the government is deprived of revenue income. Besides, the government cannot maintain jobseekers' proper information, which is important to ensure job security.

The Bangladesh missions from now on will attest all job related documents and share the information with the expatriates' welfare ministry and the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), the ministry order said.

Immigration experts say the government intention is good, but a decision without considering the implications may not be good as the recruiting agencies and unauthorised brokers are not made accountable.

"Attestation by the Bangladesh missions is useless. In Malaysia, the Bangladesh High Commission attested all documents. But the workers faced worst ever abuses in 2007, 2008 and 2009," said Harun Al Rashid, coordinator of CARAMASIA, a Malaysia-based regional forum for labour migration.

He said the Bangladesh mission in Kuala Lumpur attested documents of many fake companies and there were allegations of corruption, adding, the new

decision will only waste public money.

Rashid added if the government wants to check fake visas, it has to make its immigration police corruption-free.

Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira) Secretary General Ali Haider Chowdhury said the missions take no responsibility when a worker is cheated even if they attest his job documents. It is ultimately the recruiting agency that is held responsible and is to ensure compensation following arbitration, he added.

"There is no problem for mandatory attestation of all documents if the embassy takes full responsibility. Otherwise, it will do no good," he continued.

Recruiting agent Abdul Alim said employers will not take the hassles to go to the embassies for attestation of job documents. It will rather deter overseas jobs, he observed.

"Employers will choose other countries to recruit workers because of such hassles," he said.

Ali Haider said any recruiting agent sending workers abroad must take full responsibility of genuineness of the worker. If they cannot, they should not be in the business, he said.

If the embassies want to maintain database of all workers and employers, the recruiting agencies can help

them in this regard, he said.

Harun Al Rashid said defrauding in the labour migration process has been there for years, but the government does not seem to have taken any effective measures to make accountable the unauthorised brokers, who are bringing disasters for many jobseekers.

Mega project

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Ecneac also approved six more projects involving Tk 467 crore yesterday. They are: Strengthening of the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Novo Theatre project, Upazila Livestock Development Centre Establishment (3rd phase) project; Integrated Rural Employment Assistance for Poor Women project; Establishment of Krishibid Institution, Bangladesh (1st revised) Project; Upazila Governance project; and Construction of Nakla Bypass Road and 165 metre PC Girder Bridge over Chellakkhal River project.

Ecneac members, including Finance Minister AMA Muhith, Planning Minister AK Khandker, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury, Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan, and advisers of the prime minister, members of the planning commission, secretaries and officials concerned were present in yesterday's meeting.

Israel detains Palestinian freed in Shalit swap

AFP, Hebron

Israeli troops overnight detained a Palestinian man among those freed from prison last year in exchange for the release of a captured Israeli soldier, Palestinian sources said yesterday.

The Israeli military confirmed that it had arrested the man, named by Palestinian security sources as Ayman Sharawna, from the village of Dura, south of the West Bank city of Hebron.

A military spokeswoman said, without elaborating, that he was arrested "on suspicion of activity that endangers the security of the area."

Palestinian security sources said troops had arrested Sharawna, 36, in the early hours of Tuesday.

Sharawna was among 450 Palestinian prisoners freed from Israeli jails in the first stage of a swap that saw militant groups in Gaza release captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit.

India returns

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The Khiasis, though, had abducted seven Bangladeshis around 5:00pm on Sunday. The other worker Abdul Jalil has been sent to jail in India on charge of illegal intrusion, said police.

The six were handed over to police at Tamabil Check Post under Gowainghat upazila, four kilometres off the Stripur border camp of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB).

Locals alleged that some members of Indian Border Security Force (BSF) took away the workers from 200 yards inside the Bangladesh territory.

Contradicting the version, Commanding Officer of 5 BGB Battalion Lt Col Md Shafiqul Azam said the Indian Khiasis handed over the Bangladeshis to Dauki Police Station.

He however could not confirm the reason for the abduction.

Nepal offers

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Faced with acute power shortage, the Bangladesh government has been thinking of setting up joint-venture plants in Bhutan as well.

Apart from power projects, yesterday's meeting focused on the issue of transit to India, Nepal and Bhutan.

Muhith said Kathmandu had requested Dhaka to allow its trucks to ply between Banglabandha and Mongla. Currently, trucks from Nepal are allowed to travel up to 200 kilometres inside Bangladesh.

Last month, a core committee formed to make recommendations on the transit issue submitted its report to the commerce ministry. The three neighbouring countries to be given the facility will be charged a flat-rate transit fee on the basis of recommendations made in the report, Muhith said.

He added that some concessions might be offered to low-income countries.

The core committee's report will be sent to the three countries and transit fees and other issues will be settled through discussions with them.

Muhith also said the tenure of a water transit protocol signed with India would expire in March and Bangladesh would try to finalise the transit fees before that. Otherwise, the protocol's tenure would be extended as per previous terms.

However, the transit fees that Bangladesh now charges India will be increased.

The finance minister said there was no bar to giving India transit through Ashuganj, but infrastructure should be improved for that to happen.

His Nepalese counterpart arrived in Dhaka on January 29 to attend the Saarc finance ministers' meeting.