

Nat'l Assembly

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clear hints of its reluctance to hand over power to the majority party. The Awami League, with 169 seats in a legislative body of 313 members, was poised to form the first government elected in the country at a national level on the basis of adult franchise.

But that was not to be. Following the general elections held on December 7, 1970, the Pakistan People's Party led by former foreign minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto began maneuvering for a share of power with the Awami League at the centre. The AL, for its part, would have none of it and indeed made it clear that it intended to have a constitution framed for the country on the basis of its Six-Point programme of regional autonomy. Bhutto travelled to Dhaka at the end of January 1971 and spent three days negotiating with Mujib. The results were fruitless.

Earlier, Pakistan's military ruler General Agha Mohammad Yahya Khan had come to Dhaka to speak to the Awami League leadership on the nature of the future constitution and transfer of power to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He went public with his pronouncement that Mujib was the future prime minister of Pakistan and would in that capacity deal

with the country's problems.

On February 13, 1971, President Yahya Khan announced that the national assembly would go into session on March 3 in Dhaka. On February 15, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared in Dhaka that the constitution of Pakistan would be framed on the basis of the Six-Point and that everyone believing in democracy should respect that principle. On the same day, however, Bhutto held out the threat that unless the Awami League came forth with concessions on the constitutional issue, his party, which held 88 seats in the national assembly, would boycott the session in Dhaka.

On February 17, Mujib noted that his party was observing the situation arising out of Bhutto's threat. For his part, Bhutto warned that if the AL did not relent in its position, the assembly would become a slaughterhouse.

On March 1, 1971, even as the Awami League and other political parties prepared for the inaugural session of the national assembly two days later, General Yahya Khan abruptly deferred the meeting.

Mujib's reaction was one of condemnation of the postponement. He, however, informed the nation that in light of the changed situation, he would make his

stand clear at a public rally on March 7.

Meanwhile, East Pakistan exploded in fury at Yahya's announcement. Processions and demonstrations displayed a militant mood on the part of the people. The Bangalee reaction took the military leadership as well all political elements in West Pakistan by surprise.

Meetings

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lower than those who are left to decide on their own.

And women more likely to perform worse than men, found the study, published in journal Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B.

"You may joke about how committee meetings make you feel brain-dead, but our findings suggest that they may make you act brain-dead as well," Read Montague, who led the study, was quoted as saying by the Daily Telegraph.

"We started with individuals who were matched for their IQ. Yet when we placed them in small groups, ranked their performance on cognitive tasks against their peers, and broadcast those rankings to them, we saw dramatic drops in the ability of some study subjects to solve problems," Montague said.

Spain students protest cuts, police violence

AFP, Madrid

Thousands of students blocked roads and crowded the streets of Spanish cities yesterday in anger over crisis spending cuts and police violence against protesters.

Students' associations called marches in about 40 cities and towns across the country to protest the austerity measures they say are disrupting classes and cutting teaching jobs.

The demonstrations were also called in solidarity with students in Valencia, the region worst hit by the education funding crisis, where police beat youths in bloody baton charges during a demonstration on February 20.

"We did not create this crisis but we are paying for it in every sense," said the leader of the national students' union Tohil Delgado.

"They are making cuts in public education, they are giving us no option to work, and on top of this when we protest democratically they beat us with complete impunity."

Several hundred students whistled and chanted slogans such as "Fewer cuts, more education!" as they massed near the education ministry in central Madrid, watched by a line of police.

"They are giving much less money for scholarships for research and material that we need," said 18-year-old Ana Ramirez, a first-year biology student with dark dreadlocks. "There is less practice time in the lab. I feel discouraged, I am not going to be able to find work."

Her friend Claudia Holgueras, an 18-year-old environmental science student, added: "Education is the base of everything and it is the first thing they cut. It is in our field, research, where they are cutting the most."

From the ministry, the students along with some high school pupils marched to Madrid's Sol square and dispersed peacefully.

Sagar-Runi murder

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independence of the media, apprehended the journalist leaders in a joint statement.

Two factions of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ), Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ), Jatiya Press Club and Dhaka Reporters' Unity (DRU) signed the statement.

An HC bench on Tuesday in one of its rulings directed the information secretary to take steps within 24 hours to ensure the media do not publish any speculative news report on the incident.

The court also asked the government to explain

within two weeks why it should not be directed to find out the motive for the murders and to bring the killers to justice.

The statement also said when the parliament passed the Right to Information Act and the government constituted an Information Commission, such a directive from the HC was "unexpected and unwarranted".

The journalist leaders said they believed in the independence of the judiciary as well as the independence of the media in line with the constitution.

Sagar, news editor at the

private TV channel Maasranga, and his wife Runi, a senior reporter at another TV channel, ATN Bangla, were killed in the wee hours on February 11 at their rented apartment in the city's West Rajabazar.

Meanwhile, the leaders urged all to participate in a six-hour mass hunger strike programme at the Jatiya Press Club from 10:00am today demanding proper investigation into the double murder, exemplary punishment of the killers, stopping torture on journalists and ensuring independence of the media.

Safe motherhood

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for safe motherhood, and The Daily Star on the newspaper's office premises in the capital yesterday.

Noted economist Prof Abul Barakat presented key findings of a study on fund allocations for maternal healthcare conducted by Human Development Research Centre (HDRC).

"We are not spending enough to save our mothers," Prof Barakat warned.

Maternal healthcare services should be treated as basic public entitlement in the Constitution, he said, adding, the national budget is not prepared in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

The World Health Organization defines maternal healthcare as a quality service provided to a woman during pregnancy, delivery and post-delivery period.

The HDRC study reveals four million women got some or other maternal healthcare, whereas 5.4 million didn't get any in 2009.

According to the estimate of the study, only Tk 175 crore was allocated for maternal healthcare in 2009-10 fiscal.

The allocation is only 2.5 percent of the total budget of

the health and family welfare ministry and only 0.15 percent of the national budget, said Prof Barakat, adding, a little more than half of this allocation was spent directly for maternal healthcare services.

In 2009, the target as per the MDG was to help 1.5 million pregnant women give birth attended by skilled medical workers, he said, but only half of it could be achieved.

Prof Barakat, chief adviser to HDRC, said Tk 411 crore is required to provide maternal healthcare in the present situation, while Tk 820 crore is needed to ensure an improved service in an ideal situation.

The government has to estimate exactly how much fund is allocated for maternal healthcare and what is required to increase allocation to achieve the MDG, he added.

He said a separate operational plan for maternal healthcare is vital in the five-year programme on Health, Population and Nutrition.

Terming the government's nutrition programme a failure, he said Tk 1,478 crore was allocated for family planning programme in

2009-10 fiscal, but none of the programmes is directly related to maternal health.

Prof Tahera Ahmed of North South University said almost all of the maternal deaths, most of which occur to adolescent mothers, are preventable by awareness and trained health workers.

The deaths occur due to delay in decision-making at family level, transporting the pregnant mother to a health service facility, and providing quality care, she observed.

Md Abdullah, a retired joint secretary and presently senior consultant to HDRC, said efficiency and transparency of the health ministry is vital for spending increased allocation for maternal healthcare.

Three lawmakers -- Shammi Akhter, Nazma Akhter and Golam Mowla Roni -- said they would raise the issue in parliament and help ensure the service at their respective constituency.

Dr Farhana Ahmed, national coordinator of WRA, and Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, also spoke, while Dr Abu Jamil Faisel, country representative of Engender Health, moderated the open discussion.

Japan finishes world's tallest communications tower

AFP, Tokyo

Construction of the Tokyo Sky Tree, the world's tallest communications tower and second-highest building, finished yesterday, two months late because of the quake and tsunami that struck Japan last March.

Tourist bosses in the country hope the 634-metre (2080-foot) tower will be a big draw for foreign visitors, whose numbers have plummeted in the aftermath of the disaster and the nuclear crisis it sparked.

"The construction was originally scheduled to finish in December 2011 but was delayed due to a shortage of supplies after the disaster," said a spokeswoman for the operator, adding that the finished structure is sound.

"The building was officially handed over" from contractors to the operating firm, linked with Tobu Railway Co., on Wednesday afternoon, another spokeswoman said.

Channel i

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schools in and outside the capital.

The guests included Editor and Publisher of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam, Channel i Managing Director Faridur Reza Shagor and champs21.com CEO Russell T Ahmed. Champs21 is organising the contest.

This is the first time that such a competition is being given a television platform in Bangladesh for the children pursuing this fight for a cash prize of Tk 5 lakh along with an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington DC to compete in the spelling bee there.

The key goal of this competition is to let a child become a star through the power of education.

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