

Ershad

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director and end the stalemate centring the microcredit lender.

Expressing concern over the post being vacant for long, Ershad said the deadlock created over the issue is not only unexpected but also made the bank's affairs questionable to other nations.

"Therefore, the issue must be settled immediately," he said in a press statement issued yesterday.

The former president proposed that Dr Yunus be made the chairman of the search committee, while two members would come from the government, three from the grand alliance, two from the civil society and three women members from the Grameen Bank's board of directors.

The JP chairman, a key figure of the grand alliance, said he during his regime had approved the microcredit bank despite objections from many of his cabinet members, as such a bank was deemed very important.

"In support of the proposal, I said the microcredit bank could run like that of a cooperative where all shareholders will carry equal importance," Ershad said, adding that he had then appointed Dr Yunus as the managing director and given him power to appoint other directors.

"My decision for the sake of people not only earned good name for the country but also led to winning of the Nobel prize," Ershad said.

The government in March last year removed Dr Yunus from the post of MD of Grameen Bank that led to a huge outcry at home and abroad.

The Nobel Laureate submitted his resignation after losing a legal battle against the government's decision in the apex court and expressed his concern over the bank's future.

"I urge the government to form a committee immediately to appoint the managing director of Grameen Bank and solve all the problems regarding it," Ershad said.

VGF scheme

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suffer from shortage of food," he told a public meeting at the Chakendra Khan Para High School ground in Kurigram on Friday.

During his visit to the flood-hit northern districts, the minister said the government is paying special attention to the flood-affected northern districts including Bogra, Gaibandha and Kurigram, and a press release of the ministry.

Abdur Razzaque said the Awami League-led alliance government had successfully faced the severe floods in 1998, though the international organisations had feared an epidemic and food crises after the flood. "Now too, Bangladesh has sufficient food," he added.

Meanwhile, the overall flood situation was rapidly worsening in all the northern and northeastern districts, except that Jamuneshwary at Badarganj point of Rangpur was flowing below the danger level yesterday.

According to the Disaster Management and Relief Division, nearly eight lakh people across the country were affected by the flooding. Houses of thousands of people were devoured by many rivers.

With the floodwater receding, river erosion still continues in various parts of the country.

People who took shelter on high lands and embankments are now going back to their houses, said the division.

Nine people were killed during the floods in the affected districts. The death toll was 122 in the landslides and flash floods in Chittagong, Bandarban, and Cox's Bazar last month.

Deaths of newborn

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And then again ensuring proper care of the umbilical cord and making sure that breast feeding is initiated as soon as possible up to at least six months is crucial for newborn babies, he said, adding that bathing the baby should also wait for three days since birth.

Altaf Hossain of Directorate General of Health Services said sepsis, asphyxia and poor weight of a newborn were the major causes for neonatal deaths.

Apart from that, post-natal care is one of the toughest challenges for the government, as the sector has seriously been suffering from lack of manpower, he added.

Ziaul Matin of Unicef mentioned of five rights of a newborn. They are: rights to safe delivery, breathing, suitable temperature, breast milk and to be free from infection.

Bangladesh is very much on the right track in achieving the Millennium Development Goal-4, he said, adding, "We have data on the high-child-mortality areas in Bangladesh and know which areas to prioritise. Initiatives for community-based intervention and increasing awareness have already been taken in 32 districts."

Uzma Syed, adviser (Asia region) to Save the Children, said 12 programmes on post-natal and maternal cares were on across the country.

Shams Ul Arifeen of International Centre for Diarrhoeal Diseases Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR, B), said health workers must be adequately resourceful to educate people in remote areas on how to take care of newborn babies.

Health services have to be

extremely reliable or else rural people would simply not avail the service.

MAK Azad Chowdhury, of Neonatology at Dhaka Shishu Hospital, said just because of delayed arrival to the hospital a number of children die of post birth health complications.

He said people used to put cow dung on umbilical cords due to superstitions but now people have been made aware of the basic do's and don'ts. South India and Sri Lanka have lower infant mortality rate just because people are more aware there.

Paediatrician Rubuya Khatun said child marriage and early pregnancy must be checked as child mothers give birth to most premature babies.

Speakers also stressed the need for proper country-wide awareness campaigns regarding the neonatal and maternal care issues.

Brig Gen (ret) Shahedul Anam Khan, editor, Defence & Strategic Affairs of The Daily Star presided over the discussion. He laid importance on the role of the media and urged the government to include the media as partners in making people aware.

Speakers vouched for breast feeding immediately after births and said it could reduce 50 percent deaths of babies with low weight.

Gazi Ghiasuddin, deputy country director of Save the Children, Subrata K Bhadra of NIPORT, MA Mannan of BSMMU, Ziaul Matin of Unicef, Arefin A Islam of Smiling Sun Franchise Program, Abdul Kuddus of Diabetic Association of Bangladesh, DM Emdadul Hoque of ICDDR, B, Mamin ur Rashed, Sanjoy Kumer Dey and Javedur Rahman of Save the Children attended the roundtable.

South Asian women MPs meet today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Over a hundred women parliamentarians of eight South Asian countries will hold a conference in the capital today in an effort to ensure effective role of women leaders across the region.

The four-day-long conference styled "South Asia Women Parliamentarians' Conference: Women Leading for Gender-Responsive Governance" -- the first of its kind -- will begin at Radisson Hotel in the morning.

Women MPs from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and parliamentary experts, civil society members and high-ranking government officials are likely to join the conference, jointly organised by the USAID, The Asia Foundation and the UKaid.

According to the organisers, the objective of the conference is to promote a more effective role for women leaders across South Asia "through increased communication within and across borders".

At the conference, a regional network of women parliamentarians is likely to be formed while a Secretariat established to serve as a regional coordination centre for supporting women MPs from the eight participating countries, said the organisers.

Onion

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for the two items soars during Ramadan, beginning in the third week of this month.

Shafi Mahmud, president of Bangladesh pulses traders association, said the prices of gram increased, on average, by Tk3 per kg on the wholesale market over the last one month.

"The rise is reasonable. The prices of gram go up by such an amount ahead of Ramadan every year," he said. "It [Ramadan] is a peak season for gram. After Ramadan, the demand will fall significantly."

Gram imports stood at 58,130 tonnes in the April-June period of the just concluded fiscal year, up from 39,081 tonnes in the same period a year ago, according to Chittagong customs data.

The latest imports reflect a surplus compared to the demand for gram estimated at 50,000 tonnes during the month of Ramadan, according to Bangladesh Tariff Commission, which monitors the essentials prices for the government.

The current stock of onions should meet the increased demand during Ramadan, said Narayan Chandra Saha, an importer-wholesaler at the city's Shyambazar wholesale market.

"Retailers are mainly responsible for the hike in the prices of onions. Check the money receipts of the retailers. They are spoiling the market," said Saha, adding that onion prices came down slightly on the wholesale market yesterday.

The tariff commission's estimates show that the annual demand for onions is 20 lakh tonnes. Consumption rises to 2.20 lakh tonnes in Ramadan from 1.62 lakh tonnes in the usual months.

In the immediate past fiscal year, local production of onions stood at 16.20 lakh tonnes, harvested in March-April.

And till May, 3.5 lakh tonnes of onions were imported with 55,616 tonnes being in the pipeline, according to the tariff commission.

Aminul Islam, an onion wholesaler at Karwan Bazar, said the supply of locally produced onions had been low.

Ratan Saha, another wholesaler at Shyambazar, said the prices of onions usually rise during the monsoon when the demand for this cooking ingredient is met through stocks held by farmers and traders.

He claimed the prices were now stable on the wholesale market. But they might go up in the next couple of months due to reduced output in India, he said, citing Bangladesh's dependence on the neighbouring country for onions.

The train communication was likely to resume yesterday night, said the station master.

Refugees' long stay

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Only 19,000 Rohingyas, including those born here, were left at two refugee camps following the last repatriation in 2005.

But over the years the number of registered refugees in the two camps -- one at Nayapara of Teknaf and another at Kutupalang of Ukhiapazila -- has risen to 29,325. Around 18 thousand of them live at the Nayapara camp alone.

Of the total number of refugees in the two camps, around 4,000 do not get facilities as refugees because they were not present during the last survey in 2005.

Many refugees who were absent during the survey later on different occasions came and claimed to be registered refugees. Although allowed to live in the camps, they did not get permits to receive returns.

An official said refugees were not allowed to go out of the camp but they hardly follow the rule.

One of the reasons behind the rise in the number of refugees from around 19 thousand to around 29 thousand in the last seven years is new births.

Some 68 refugees were sent back to Myanmar from Nayapara camp in 2005, and 35 refugees died the same year. But the number rose from 455 that year due to the birth of 558 children in the refugee families.

After 2005, there was no other repatriation except for some resettlement of some 926 refugees in third countries in the last few years.

Mohammad Kamruzzaman, who is in charge of Nayapara camp, recently told The Daily Star that 57 percent population of the refugee camps were those born here over the last 21 years.

Population growth rate and the family size of the Rohingya refugees are higher than that of Bangladesh.

According to the 2011 census, the average family size in the country is 4.4. But local officials say the figure is over 8 in the Rohingya refugee camps. Bangladesh's population growth rate is 1.34 percent but that of

Rohingyas is around 3pc.

Besides, the national infant mortality rate is 37 per thousand a year. In the camps it is only five.

Officials say they face complications in the process of repatriation, which has to be voluntary according to a memorandum of understanding between Bangladesh and United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

Bangladesh needs clearance from Myanmar before sending back even a single Rohingya refugee.

Over the years, Yangon has given clearance for 10,315 refugees following verification. More than 15 thousand are yet to get the nod.

Officials say Dhaka sent Yangon a list of around six thousand Rohingya refugees for clearance in August 2009.

As the repatriation has been stalled for many years, the refugee families who were waiting to be repatriated despite securing the clearance had new members born. The additional population would now require the clearance.

Against this backdrop, Bangladesh made some moves in the last few years to repatriate the Rohingya refugees. Myanmar also expressed its willingness to take back some 2,415 refugees from the list of verified ones.

In November last year, the Myanmar embassy in Dhaka wrote a letter to Bangladesh, saying its government was "ready and willing" to receive 2,415 verified individuals under both countries' approval and in cooperation with UNHCR.

Besides, very few refugees want to return to their country. Those who are willing to go back want to return with all the relatives they have in the camps. Even some families who came from the same villages of Myanmar want to go back together.

Some officials said there was at least a little hope of repatriation before the early June sectarian clashes.

The Daily Star talked to a few hundred refugees at Nayapara camp in Teknaf in the third week of last month.

All of them said they would feel insecure in Myanmar.

"The recent incidents [clashes in Maungdaw and Akyab] have further delayed the repatriation process," said Md Feroz Salah Uddin, the refugee relief and repatriation commissioner.

"But as soon as the situation [in Myanmar] improves, the process [of repatriation] will acquire pace," he said and hoped for a solution to the recent problems in Myanmar's bordering area with Bangladesh shortly.

Salah Uddin said it was very important to build confidence among the Rohingya refugees so that they could decide to go back to their homeland. "I hope it [repatriation] will be quicker, if Myanmar comes forward to build this confidence."

Though there has been no repatriation since 2005, the authorities have resettled some 926 Rohingya refugees in Canada, the UK, New Zealand, the US, Norway, Ireland, Sweden and Australia.

But it has had a negative impact on the repatriation process, because refugees now prefer resettlement to going back to Myanmar.

"As time goes by, the issue gets more complicated. But nobody is going for a permanent solution," Salah Uddin said.

Nayapara camp in-charge Kamruzzaman said there were three solutions: repatriation, reintegration (merger with the local population) and resettlement.

Some officials said the UNHCR had been pursuing Bangladesh for the latter to allow Rohingya refugees to work in its territory, though they do not have any permission to go out of the camp. The authorities were even told to let the refugees merge with Bangladeshis.

Salah Uddin told this correspondent, "Repatriation is the best solution and all efforts should be concentrated on this."

It would be helpful if UNHCR gave importance to repatriation, he said, adding that efforts from UNHCR and international agencies were needed more in Myanmar for the sake of the repatriation of

NHRC chief

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view-exchange meeting at the court premises in Narayanganj city's Chandmari area.

"Can we ask for disbanding the US army simply because allegations have been made against them for killing many innocent people in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan," he questioned.

In a modern civilised democracy, noted the NHRC chief, a public organisation cannot turn into a party organisation.

Other than the NHRC, many local rights bodies have raised their voice against extrajudicial killings, crossfire deaths and forced disappearances, said Mizanur.

Sultana Kamal, executive director of Ain o Salish Kendra, was the chief speaker at the meeting, organised by Manabdhikar Ainjibi Parishad's Narayanganj unit.

Regarding the report of New York-based HRW, she said local rights bodies have been talking about the issues for quite some time now.

She added: "But there is a difference between the language of their [HRW's] recommendations and that of ours."

"We have always suggested that the Rab should stick to its terms of reference. But now we see that it [Rab] has deviated from that."

Sometimes the Rab shows that people are delighted to see the killings (of terrorists), but curbing terrorism in this way is illegal, anti-constitutional and extrajudicial, she mentioned.

Advocate Khalilur Rahman presided over the meeting.

The HRW released a report on Wednesday in the capital. It claimed that the ongoing trial in 2009 BDR mutiny is fundamentally flawed and the accused are subjected to gross human rights violations.

The rights body called upon the government to immediately halt the trial and disband the Rab.

Meanwhile, the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHR) has alleged that the Bangladesh government has planned to arrest the rights activists who provided information for the recently published report of HRW.

In a statement, the AHR claimed that they have learnt from reliable sources that there are discussions among some quarters in Bangladesh government to arrest the rights activists.

The government is also considering to charge them with treason, sedition and other criminal offences, added the statement.

The AHR urged the government not to take any action against any human rights organisation or rights activist, for whatever contribution they might have made to the report.

Bangladeshi

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of the district.

The injured was admitted to a local hospital in critical condition.

Victim's brother Jashim said Jashmed and his elder brother Salimullah were staying in their shop when a group of miscreants appeared there and asked for cigarettes. After taking cigarettes, they fired several shots on them, leaving Jashmed dead on the spot and injuring Salimullah around 12:15am Bangladesh time.

The two brothers had gone to South Africa for

US court fines

Iran \$813 mn

for 1983

Lebanon attack

AFP, Washington

A US federal judge has ordered Iran to pay more than \$813 million in damages and interest to the families of 241 US soldiers killed in the 1983 bombing of a Marine barracks in Lebanon.

"After this opinion, this court will have issued over \$8.8 billion in judgments against Iran as a result of the 1983 Beirut bombing," Judge Royce Lamberth wrote in a ruling this week, a copy of which was seen Friday by AFP.

Sohel Taj tenders

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Abedin, personal secretary to the Speaker, told The Daily Star yesterday.

His resignation now puts an end to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's efforts to keep him as a state minister without portfolio since his resignation from the cabinet on May 31, 2009.

Under Article 58 (1) (b) of the constitution, Taj's resignation as an MP disqualifies him from continuing as a state minister without portfolio.

Sohel Taj, son of Tajuddin Ahmad, the nation's prime minister at the head of the Mujibnagar government during the War of Liberation in 1971, stepped down as state minister for home following reported interference in his work.

But government documents continued to mention him as a state minister and Hasina on April 19 said she had not "accepted" his resignation.

Legal experts, however, say there is no need for the prime minister to accept the resignation letter of a minister or a junior minister.

Hasina's announcement apparently prompted Sohul Taj, who was elected MP on the ruling Awami League ticket from Gazipur-4 constituency at the last parliament

ary polls, to resign from parliament on April 23 this year.

He did not cite any reason for his resignation as lawmaker but had issued an open letter to the people of his constituency, saying he had taken the decision after "much thought".

Speaker Abdul Hamid, however, on May 9 declined to "accept" the resignation, claiming Sohul did not follow constitutional provisions and rules of procedure of the House in submitting the resignation letter.

Clarifying his decision, he said Sohul Taj, who was then in the US, did not write the letter in his own hand; it rather was typed up. Also, he did not submit the letter in person and it did not contain the phrase "willing to resign," which is mandatory under Article 67 of the constitution.

Sohul Taj had to come to Bangladesh to submit in person his resignation letter to the Speaker if he desired to quit, Hamid added.

The reasons the Speaker had cited to justify his decision, however, were not in conformity with a High Court verdict.

According to a 1995 HC judgment, the constitution does not have any provision authorising the Speaker to

accept or reject a resignation letter submitted by an MP.

On the practice of a submission of a resignation letter by a lawmaker in person, the HC said the letter "need not be written by the lawmaker concerned; it is sufficient if it is signed by him or her."

However, Sohul Taj finally came to Bangladesh from the US and tendered the resignation letter to the Speaker yesterday evening, putting an end to the long drama over his resignation from parliament and also from Hasina's cabinet.

Contacted by The Daily Star over telephone, a senior official in the parliament secretariat last night said the secretariat will today publish a gazette notification declaring vacant Sohul Taj's seat in the House. The Speaker may also inform parliament today about the resignation.

A copy of the gazette notification will be sent to the Election Commission that will hold by-election to Gazipur-4 constituency within next 90 days.

Meanwhile, after tendering his resignation to the Speaker, Sohul Taj met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at

BNP to launch

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Farroque said at a press conference at the Sylhet circuit house in the afternoon.

He also talked about the recent report of Human Rights Watch on the BDR mutiny trial. The report says the mass trial of the February 2009 mutineers at the Bangladesh Rifles (now Border Guard Bangladesh) headquarters is fundamentally flawed and the accused are being subjected to gross human rights violations.

The BNP will soon give its reaction to the HRW report, Farroque said.

In response to the HRW's call to disband the Rapid Action Battalion, he said the

ruling Awami League had been using Rab in its interests. The BNP had formed the force, aiming to improve the law and order situation, but now Rab had drifted away from its focus, he added.

The main opposition will soon make its stance clear on the statement of the New York-based rights body about Rab, Farroque said.

"The prime minister and the home minister's personal forces are now ruling the country."

The inefficiency of the government was already clear to the world, the opposition chief whip said. He added that the World Bank's withdrawal of a \$1.2 billion

credit for the Padma bridge project had shed light on the government's corruption.

Other members of the parliamentary team --- AKM Hafizur Rahman, Nazrul Islam Manzu, Ashraf Uddin Nizan and Shami Akhtar --- were present at the press conference. Sylhet City BNP chief MA Haque and former lawmakers Dildar Hossain Selim and Kolim Uddin Milon were also there.

On the instructions of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, the parliamentary team visited Ilias's village home and met his mother there. The lawmakers also visited the house of Ilias's driver Ansar Ali.