

Diplomacy

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said a top official source yesterday.  
The cabinet meeting on Monday decided to discuss the issue with the three countries and ADB, Jica and IDB and initiate sending the proposal to the global lender if the situation improves.

The government also aims to ensure that the project co-financiers do not back off in case of a negative response from the WB again, the source added.

"ADB, Jica, IDB, the US, the UK and India have shown their interest [in helping resolve the issue]. We will take their advice [before seeking a WB review]," Finance Minister AMA Muhith said yesterday.

"Of course, they have asked the WB to settle the issue quickly," he told the press at the Cabinet Division of the secretariat after his meeting with deputy commissioners.

"The US, the UK and India asked the WB to work out the issue. They did that on different occasions," he said. "I have to request them to look at it."

When journalists mentioned Sunday's cabinet decision not to request the WB for a review, the minister said, "We've decided not to make the proposal for the time being. We will monitor the situation."

A finance ministry official said the government was delaying making the proposal to the WB because a further refusal would mean further embarrassment.

"The government will first discuss the issue through various diplomatic channels. The process has already been initiated. Later, it will proceed to make a proposal to the WB."

The government is focused on convincing the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica) and Islamic Development Bank (IDB) to honour their funding commitments.

Besides, it would seek additional funding from the WB to construct the 6.2km bridge.

If the government finally moves to build the bridge with its own money, it will require a lot of foreign currency. Eighty percent of Tk 15,000 crore for the main bridge construction and 60 percent of Tk 6,000 crore for river training will have to be met by foreign currency, said the ministry official.

The World Bank has cancelled its \$1.2 billion credit for the Padma bridge construction on graft allegations involving Bangladeshi officials.

Of the co-financiers, IDB and Jica have not yet followed suit while the ADB said it was "unable" to finance the project.

Muhith said yesterday that apart from the WB, no co-financier had cancelled their funding. "We are hopeful that others will stay."

"We are ready to construct the bridge with our own feed, but I think we might not have to do it alone."

However, the minister said the government had already allocated this fiscal year's funds for the project. "We may have to provide some more money."

Buet closed

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ultimatum demanding resignation of Vice Chancellor Prof Nazrul Islam and Pro-VC Prof Habibir Rahman by Saturday.

TIES WITH DHAKA

Indian govt's failure irks North-east

STAR REPORT

India's failure to reciprocate Bangladesh's "peace gestures" is frustrating the chief ministers of the north-eastern states, Mumbai-based Daily News and Analysis (DNA) reported yesterday.

The daily reported that granting a concession on Teesta River water and operationalising the already signed land boundary agreement were two important issues expected by Bangladesh.

The chief ministers of India's northeastern states are peeved at the United Progressive Alliance government's inability and indecisiveness to table the Border Management Bill in the previous budget session of Parliament due to stiff opposition from the Trinamool and the Bharatiya Janata Party, the newspaper said.

"The delay is hampering the transborder trade, contact and cooperation. Improvement in relations with Bangladesh is a real game-changer for the north east," said Meghalaya Chief Minister Mukul Sangma.

Indian government officials admit that Sheikh Hasina's government in Dhaka has immensely contributed towards maintaining peace in the militancy-affected north-eastern states.

She reversed the policy of her predecessors by ordering closure of several mili-

'Profiteers'

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oil and sugar.  
Mozibur was addressing a view-exchange meeting on commodity prices at the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) auditorium in the capital.

Speaking at the meeting, organised by DCCI, businessmen said many of them are selling items counting losses. The prices of ginger and garlic have gone up due to complexities over import duties on the spices in the current budget.

They, however, admitted that they are selling some items such as lentils at "a bit higher" prices.

At the meeting, the Tariff Commission chairman presented profit margins item by item. He said a kilogram of ginger costs Tk 37, but the item is being sold for Tk 75.

The price of imported onions should be Tk 14 to Tk 15 a kg, but it is being sold for Tk 25, he said.

The import cost of dates is Tk 58 a kg whereas the item is being sold for Tk 100.

Businessmen are making a profit of Tk 43 on a kg of lentils, Mozibur said. "It is profiteering and must be stopped."

He likened the practice of hiking prices abnormally to sucking people's blood.  
Pleading with businessmen, he said: "Please, do not do business to make abnormally high profits. It is irreligious."

Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry President AK Azad called for efforts to stop the use of formalin in fruits, strengthen market monitoring and cut bank interest rates on loans for imports of agricultural items.

He said there is no possibility of a price spiral ahead as there are adequate stocks of essentials in the country.

Abul Hossain Mian, director general of National Consumers Rights Protection Directorate, said the directorate will soon have the required manpower to strengthen market monitoring.

He said the directorate will open its offices at district level gradually.

The director general emphasised the need for raising public awareness about the consumers' rights protection act and its proper implementation.

DCCI President Asif Ibrahim said the main rea-

tancy training camps and even handed over some hardcore Assam militants to India.

Five Indian states of West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram share a 2,429 mile-long border with Bangladesh.

Without naming them, Sangma told DNA that certain political parties had been bent on ruining the prime minister's Look East vision and his carefully strategic initiative towards Dhaka.

He believes that his state, along with the entire north east, was on the verge of making huge strides in development by the Look East policy.

The Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) government in Tripura is also demanding greater economic engagement with Bangladesh.

Sangma, who met Indian premier Manmohan Singh in Delhi recently, demanded improvement in internal waterways to Bangladesh to promote cross-border investments.

He further asked for a transit route to Bangladesh's Chittagong port, claiming it was the nearest port for all in the north-east.

Stressing cooperation with Bangladesh, the chief minister said improved relations had enabled them to move heavy machinery from Kolkata to Tripura through Bangladesh territory to set up the Palatan gas-based power plant.

WB might

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of its loan for the Padma bridge project.

Speaking at a press briefing at his office yesterday, the ACC chairman said as the evaluation committee for the project did not select Chinese Railway Construction Company (CRCC) for constructing the bridge, the company and its local agent Venture International might have misguidedly the WB, and therefore it cancelled its loan commitment.

Explaining why the CRCC was not selected, Ghulam Rahman said although the company had no experience of steel piling needed for such a bridge, its local agent had submitted various fake documents mentioning that it (CRCC) had experience of constructing the Auckland Bay Bridge in San Francisco.

But the evaluation committee headed by Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury detected the fraudulent acts of Venture International, and did not fall in its trap, said the ACC chairman.

On the other hand, the ACC chairman said, the Chinese company and its local agent misguidedly the WB saying that the evaluation committee had done injustice to them.

He also said as the CRCC was not selected despite repeated recommendations by the WB, the bank became unhappy.

Replying to a query, he said, "There is no scope of action against venture international according to our laws."

Asked, Ghulam Rahman said the ACC is not sending any team to Canada to collect information related to the Padma bridge graft allegation.

He said it has found "documentary evidence of corruption" against a number of political leaders who had been in power in the past and these people were involved in amassing wealth by abusing power.

"We're still receiving documentary evidence of corruption against such people," he said.

State cheating

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for "obstructing law enforcers from discharging their duties". Earlier in April last year, the 17-year-old was charged in an arms case.

Ironically, the investigation into the case lodged by his mother against six Rab personnel has not been completed even in 14 months.

The rights boss accused the home ministry of "non-cooperation" in this regard, and said: "The home ministry is not investigating the [shooting] incident even after the commission repeatedly wrote to the ministry to do so."

Poet, family not spared

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the second prosecution witness in the war crimes case against Quader Mollah, also said the Jamaat assistant secretary general was the "key person" in the brutal killing of Mirpur Bangla College student Pallab during the war.

The 58-year-old witness said he had heard about the incidents from people leaving the capital in panic after the crackdown on the night of March 25, 1971, night.

The three-member tribunal headed by Justice ATM Fazle Kabir also recorded the cross-examination of the witness before it adjourned the case proceedings until today.

During his two-and-a-half-hour-long statement, Shahidul said, "On March 27, 1971, Abdul Quader Mollah, Hasib Hasmi, Abbas Chairman, Akhter Gunda, Nehal and many others killed poet Meherun Nesa, her brothers and mother and chopped their bodies into pieces."

"Akhter Gunda and his accomplices forcibly brought one Pallab alias Tuntuni from Thathari Bazar to Muslim Bazar in Mirpur. Then they [Akhter and his accomplices] cut his fingers and hung him up on a tree and killed him mercilessly," the witness went on to say.

"The incident occurred may be on April 5, 1971, and Quader Mollah and Akhter Gunda were the key persons behind the incident," added Shahidul.

Shahidul said he was a student leader before the Liberation War and had had taken part in different movements, including the six-point movement of 1966 and in the 1970 election campaigns for the Awami League-blessed candidates of Mohammadpur and Mirpur areas.

He said Quader Mollah and his accomplices had taken part in the election campaign for the "infamous" Ghulam Azam, the then ameer of East Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami and a candidate of the area.

Shahidul said during the regime of military dictator Gen Yahya Khan, a false case was filed against him and he got acquitted afterwards.

"But those who had testified for me [in the case] were apprehended and killed by Abdul Quader Mollah, Akhter Gunda, Nehal, Hasib Hasmi, Abbas Chairman and other Jamaat men and non-Bangalees in the black night of March 25, 1971," said Shahidul.

Shahidul said after Father of the Nation Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's speech at Dhaka's Race Course Maidan on March 7, 1971, they had prepared to take part in the Liberation War and hoisted the national flag of Bangladesh on March 23, 1971, the Republic Day of Pakistan.

The witness said on the morning of March 26, 1971, he saw the houses of Bangalees in Mirpur area burning and Biharis celebrat-

ing. "When I and Mantu [one of his Shahidul friends] had gone closer, Quader Mollah and his accomplices tried to catch us."

"We escaped by swimming cross the Turag river and took shelter in Bangaon village."

Later, Shahidul went to India for training and took part in the Liberation War, said the witness.

Shahidul, also chief of Mama Group Guerrilla Bahini, said Mirpur area had become enemy-free on January 31, 1972, even though the Pakistani army had formally surrendered on December 16, 1971.

"These enemies were Khan Senas [Pakistan army personnel] Jamaat-e-Islami men, Al-Badr men, Al-Shams men and Razakars [three auxiliary forces of the Pakistan army]," said the witness, adding, "And Quader Mollah was not detached from any of the incidents."

The witness said the freedom fighters attacked the Mohammadpur Physical Training Centre, Graphics Arts Institute and "the headquarters of the then Pakistan army" on December 16, 1971.

On Victory Day and in the face of a strong attack, the Pakistani army left the places and merged with Biharis (non-Bangalee people) in Mohammadpur and Mirpur areas.

"Bihari, Khan Sena, Jamaat-e-Islami along with the members of Islami Chhatra Sangha [the then student wing of Jamaat] built a strong resistance [in Mohammadpur and Mirpur areas]," said the witness.

War-crimes accused

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the government side has contacted us to address our demands. So, we will observe the strike," Rustom Ali, the association convener, told The Daily Star last evening.

However, trucks and covered-vans that will carry relief materials for flood-affected people will remain out of the purview of the strike, he said.

The association convener also threatened to go for tougher movement, if their demands were not met. The 14-point demand of the association include stopping extortion in ferry ghats, easing the process of issuing driving licence, allowing trucks and covered vans to ply city streets during daytime.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Mohanagar CNG Autorickshaw Owners Association has called off their two-day strike that was scheduled to begin today.

The decision came following a two-hour tripartite meeting among the auto-rickshaws owners, Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) officials and law enforcers yesterday.

The association leaders called the strike on Saturday to press home their 10-point demand.

"We have postponed the strike following assurance from the BRTA chairman to address our demands within two months," said ATM Nazmul Hasan, general secretary of the association, yesterday.

BRTA Chairman Ayubur Rahman told The Daily Star, "We are not the authority to address all their demands. We assured them of placing their demands before the authorities like NBR, communications ministry and other government bodies."

The 10-point demand include increasing economic lifespan of CNG-run autorickshaws from 11 to 15 years, stopping police harassment and declaring the sector as an industry.

"I don't think the Supreme Court will budge from its position. The Supreme Court has opened a case and it will take it to its logical end rather than aborting it under pressure," he told AFP.

"It will sharpen the already simmering fight between the judiciary and the government."

LeT now more dangerous than al-Qaeda: US expert

IANS, Washington

With al-Qaeda on the ropes, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), with the help of its Pakistani backers, is now probably the most dangerous terror group in the world, according to a former CIA analyst.

The November 2008 attack by ten LeT terrorists on multiple targets in Mumbai, India was the most significant and innovative terrorist attack since 9/11, Bruce Riedel, Senior Fellow Foreign Policy at Brookings Institution, a Washington based think tank, wrote in The Daily Beast.

War-crimes accused Salauddin Quader's defence counsel Ahsanul Huq Heena yesterday asked the sixth prosecution witness whether he took his father to the hospital.

Nirmal said it was impossible for him to take his father to the hospital as Hindus could not move safely during the Liberation War. He said he had given his seriously wounded father water in a pot and left the house on the night of April 13.

Heena also asked whether he took his father inside the house.

Nirmal said his father was quite heavy and gravely injured. "It was difficult for my brother and me to carry him inside the house," he said.

Asked why he had not called for help, Nirmal said almost all in the neighbourhood had left. "On 15-16 April, some locals came to see my father," Nirmal said.

At about 4:00pm Heena sought adjournment of the court proceedings.

Chairman of the tribunal Justice Md Nizamul Huq gave the defence two options; either continue with the cross-examination or the tribunal would pass an order which may not go in the defence's favour.

Heena seemed discontent with what the tribunal said and continued the cross-examination. The tribunal asked Heena to take rest for a while as the counsel was having trouble keeping pace and was asking redundant questions.

Since the stipulated time for the cross-examination was almost over, Justice Nizamul asked the counsel how much time he needed more to finish off.

"I need one or one and a half hours more," Heena said.

The tribunal then passed an order saying, "Seeing the health condition of defence lawyer is not well, we are inclined to allow him one and half hours more."

Pak MPs pass bill

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dollar corruption cases against the president.

The court dismissed Yousuf Raza Gilani as prime minister on June 19 after convicting him of contempt in April for refusing to reopen the cases against President Asif Ali Zardari.

The bill passed by the lower house of the Pakistani parliament on Monday night said senior government figures including the president and the PM could not be found guilty of contempt for acts performed as part of their job.

The bill must be passed by the upper house and signed off by the president before it becomes law.

The main opposition party Pakistan Muslim League-N headed by former prime minister Nawaz Sharif boycotted the proceedings, but party spokesman Siddiqui Farooq condemned the new bill.

"Since it is designed and aimed to protect one person namely Asif Ali Zardari from accountability, therefore it has no constitutional, legal and moral effects," he told AFP.

Ashraf defended the bill, saying it would not obstruct

anyone from doing their duties, nor would it make anyone a "holy cow".

Law minister Farooq H Naek, who introduced the bill, said confusion in the existing contempt law had been removed and insisted the amendment was not made in haste.

The allegations against Zardari date back to the 1990s, when he and his late wife, late premier Benazir Bhutto, are suspected of using Swiss bank accounts to launder \$12 million allegedly paid in bribes by companies seeking customs inspection contracts.

The Swiss shelved the cases in 2008 when Zardari became president and the government insists the president has full immunity as head of state.

But in 2009 the Supreme Court overturned a political amnesty that had frozen investigations into the president and other politicians, ordering that the cases be reopened.

Author and political analyst Imtiaz Gul said he did not think the new bill would help the prime minister, even if it makes it into law.

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WAR CRIMES TRIAL

Witness Nirmal cross-examined

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

During cross-examination yesterday, prosecution witness Nirmal Chandra Sharma told the International Crimes Tribunal-1 that he had to flee his home fearing for his life in 1971 and could not even attend to his wounded father.

Witness Nirmal on Tuesday in his deposition had said he witnessed his family members brutally killed in a raid of the Pakistani army, accompanied by BNP leader Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury, on April 13, 1971, during the Liberation War.

Nirmal lost his mother, brother, two uncles and nephew when the Pakistani army lined them up and opened fire on them at their home in Modhya Gohira village in Chittagong. His father Joyonto Kumar Sharma's left hand and leg were riddled by bullets. He had died after suffering for 5-6 years.

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