

Nuhash Palli

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"Humayun will not be buried at Nuhash Palli in Gazipur since the place is quite far for his family, friends and admirers to pay a visit. As Humayun is a very popular figure, the family does not want to make it difficult for people willing to see his last resting place," he said.

Humayun's mother Ayesha Fayz also does not want her son to be buried at Nuhash Palli, said Mahabunnabi, who is staying at her Pallabi residence in the capital.

Earlier, Sammilite Sanskritik Jote President Nasiruddin Yousuff Bachchu had said Humayun Ahmed would be buried at Nuhash Palli, which was a very favourite retreat for him.

Meanwhile, the family and friends of Humayun accompanying his body boarded an Emirates flight at John F Kennedy Airport in New York for home at 11:20pm (NY time) on Saturday.

Abdul Momen, Bangladesh permanent representative to the UN, Sabir Ahmed Chowdhury, consul general, and hundreds of expatriate Bangladeshis were present at the airport.

The flight is scheduled to land at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 8:40am (BST) today.

Foreign Secretary Mijarul Quayes will receive the body on behalf of the government.

Humayun, who was also a famed filmmaker, died at Manhattan's Bellevue Hospital in New York after a nine-month fight with colon cancer.

His wife Meher Afroz Shaon, two sons Nishad and Ninth, mother-in-law Tahura Ali, sister-in-law Senjuti Afroz and friend Mazharul Islam are accompanying the body.

From the airport, the body will be taken to the Central Shaheed Minar and kept there from 11:00am to 2:00pm for people of all walks of life to pay last respect to him, said Muhammad Zafar Iqbal, younger brother of the renowned novelist.

Arrangements will be made there so that Ayesha Fayz can see her eldest son for the last time.

Humayun's second namaz-e-janaza will be held at the National Eidgah at 2:30pm. Then he will be laid to rest wherever decided, Zafar Iqbal told this correspondent.

About his last days at hospital, Zafar Iqbal said, infection developed in his brother's lungs following his second surgery.

"It was very unfortunate for us," he said.

Though, colon cancer was cited as the reason for his death, Zafar Iqbal said, he was recovering from cancer after the second surgery.

If he had survived, he would have recovered fully through the healing process could take time, he added.

BIWTA staff

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the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court within a day or two," Benjir said.

Salam misappropriated the amount from the BIWTA Provident Fund between January 2007 and November 2010, he added.

The BIWTA authorities suspended Salam on November 25, 2010 and the ACC filed two separate cases -- one for embezzlement of government money and another for laundering money -- against him and his wife while the capital's Motijheel Police Station.

Salam is now in jail while his wife Lovely on the run.

PM greets

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behalf, I have immense pleasure in conveying to you, our warmest congratulations and heartfelt felicitations on your election as the president of the Republic of India," she said in a message.

"I have as much pleasure in rejoicing your becoming the first Bengali to hold that highest office," she said.

Referring to bilateral relations exist between the two neighbouring countries, Hasina said Bangladesh attached the highest importance to ever strengthening and consolidating the bond of friendship with India.

Govt may revive

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The users said the discontinuation of the minimum bill system had caused a rise in their monthly bills at a time when households were struggling with high electricity prices.

The government hiked electricity prices three times in the last five months. On March 1, it withdrew the common lowest slab facility that had been enjoyed by all residential users.

Households now pay Tk 3.05 for per kilowatt of power consumption if their total monthly usage is below 100 units.

However, they have to pay Tk 4.29 per unit for electricity usage above 100 units and below 400 units a month. Households consuming more than 400 units have to pay a hefty Tk 7.89 per unit.

The rates apply to customers of the Power Development Board, Dhaka Power Distribution Company Ltd, Dhaka Electric Supply Company Ltd and West Zone Power Distribution Company Ltd.

Earlier, households used to pay a mandatory minimum bill and additional bill for their consumption above 100 units.

If the electricity consumption of a home exceeded 100 units and remained below 400 units, they paid higher rates for the units consumed above the 100 mark.

Now, the unit price of electricity for households squarely depends on how much power is consumed in a month.

Speaking at a public hearing on proposals to increase bulk price of electricity last week, Berc Chairman Syed Yusuf Hossain said, they are mulling over whether the slowest slab facility should be restored.

Salim Mahmud, a member of Berc, earlier told The Daily Star, "We have withdrawn the common lowest slab facility to give relief to the government from its huge subsidies.

"We want to make sure that the real small consumers enjoy the lowest slab facility. The well-off should not get the benefit of the subsidised rates."

Consumers rights activists termed the Berc move unacceptable and demanded the previous tariff system should be reinstated.

Prof Dr M Shamsul Alam, energy adviser of the Consumers Association of Bangladesh, last week said a consumer in Dhaka paid an electricity bill of around Tk 1,000 in February this year, but the same consumer paid Tk 4,000 in June.

The reinstatement of the lowest slab facility could bring relief to the ordinary consumers, rights activists observed.

Padma 'graft'

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quizzed the three at the commission's headquarters from 10:00am to 1:00pm, Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, ACC public relations officer, told The Daily Star.

The three are Dr Abdus Sabur, managing director of Bets Consulting Service Ltd, Shahidul Hasan Khan, managing director of Prokolpo Upadesta Limited, and MA Aziz, director of BCL Associates Ltd.

Pranab Kumar said the trio were interrogated about whether they knew anything regarding the alleged corruption in appointing the Canadian company as the consultant for the Padma Bridge or whether they had any links to the matter.

While leaving the ACC office after the interrogation, Shahidul Hasan told journalists, "As we are sub-agents of SNC-Lavalin, the ACC called us for what we know about the allegation."

He said, "If SNC-Lavalin had been appointed as consultant for the Padma Bridge, we would have a share from it as a sub-agent."

Earlier on July 2, the ACC quizzed Ziaul Huq, managing director of Engineering and Planning Consultant Ltd (EPC), the local agent of SNC-Lavalin, about why he had frequently visited the office of Bangladesh Bridges Division.

The anti-graft commission launched two investigations into the allegations of corruption in the main bridge project and in the appointment process of SNC-Lavalin after the World Bank had drawn its attention on the matter last October.

Since then the WB had kept its \$1.2 billion loan for the bridge suspended until June 30, when it finally pulled out of the project.

The ACC has already completed the first investigation and found no evidence of irregularities in the main bridge project.

Last November, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) on WB's request launched an investigation against SNC-Lavalin. They raided the company offices, seized documents from there and arrested former chief executive Pierre Duhaime, Bangladeshi-born Canadian citizen Ismail Hossain and Indian-born Canadian citizen Ramesh Saha.

Human rights

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The seminar titled "Indigenous Peoples in the Plain Land: Challenges and Prospects" was jointly organised by Indigenous Peoples Development Services and Oxfam GB.

Addressing as the chief guest, Hanna said the EU will continue discussions with the government and other stakeholders on human rights protection.

National Human Rights Commission Chairman Prof Mizanur Rahman, also present on the occasion as special guest, said a country cannot be called democracy if rights of its indigenous people are not ensured equally with other citizens.

He said the land ministry should establish a separate land commission for dealing with the disputes over the indigenous people's properties.

Expressing annoyance at policies of bureaucratic institutions involved with the indigenous issues, the NHRC boss said government officials need to be acquainted with the communities so that they can realise what their responsibilities are.

ILO Country Director Andre Bogui urged the government to take steps for protection of the socio-cultural rights of indigenous communities.

Bangladesh Adivasi Forum General Secretary Sanjeeb Dronng said many indigenous families, especially those living in the plain land, have been evicted from their ancestral homesteads by land grabbers.

He placed some recommendations including their constitutional recognition as Adivasi, formation of a land commission to protect their land rights and measures for their educational facilities and economic development.

The seminar held at Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh was also addressed by Gareth Price Jones, country director of Oxfam GB, with Dhaka University Prof Dalem Ch Barman in the chair.

Govt may accept WB's

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The finance minister yesterday pointed out that the government had been considering several options for the project. And the first option was to restore the WB-led financing arrangement.

Muhith was talking to reporters at the finance ministry after he received a cheque from Bangladesh Development Bank Ltd in payment of dividend to the government.

The finance minister said he had mentioned many times that there was no problem in having an international panel to oversee the ACC's probe into the corruption allegations in the project. The commission was prepared for that.

Goldstein in an e-mail interview with The Daily Star published on July 14 responded to the question of whether the government's refusal to remove the minister in charge from the cabinet was the biggest reason for the bank to cancel its financing.

She said the WB had suggested that the government adopt four measures. But the government was unable to commit to two of them.

The two measures that the government refused to take were to appoint an international panel to oversee the ACC probe into the WB's graft allegations in the project, and to send on leave the officials and the minister in charge during the investigation.

Preferring anonymity, a finance ministry official

said the WB had advised sending five public officials and former communications minister Abul Hossain on leave.

During talks with the WB in June, the government did not agree to send the minister on leave, said the official.

Muhith at a high-level meeting last week indicated that the government was ready to send all five public officials and the minister on leave in order to reach a compromise with the WB. And the government had already communicated it to the project's co-financiers, the official said.

Abul Hossain in an advertisement in several newspapers recently said he was ready to take any step since some respectable persons thought his presence in the cabinet might hinder the probe into the WB's corruption allegations in the project.

Muhith said yesterday the government had three other options for implementing the project if the WB finally did not change its decision.

One option is that the government will request the other financiers to stay in the project. In that case, it will be necessary to sign new contracts.

"We hope they will stay with us," He, however, said the government would have to find new financiers to provide it with the foreign currency the WB had earlier committed.

Another option is to implement the project on the basis of a Public Private

Partnership (PPP) initiative as proposed by Malaysia, said Muhith.

And the other option is to construct the bridge with the government's own resources, said the finance minister.

Taliban execute 5 Afghans for Nato links

AFP, Kabul

Taliban insurgents executed five civilians near Kabul for working with Nato troops, authorities said yesterday, the latest in a series of militant activities in villages around the capital.

The news of the incident in Wardak province's Jalrez district, 40 kilometres south of Kabul, came a day after the insurgents publicly lashed two Afghan men and just weeks after the public execution of a woman for adultery.

In Jalrez, the rebels captured six Afghans returning home from work at a Nato base. The bodies of five of them were found yesterday, all booby-trapped with explosives, a statement from the provincial governor's office said.

Their hands were tied behind their backs, a witness told AFP.

The sixth man fled his captors, the statement added, blaming the killings on the Taliban, the main insurgent group fighting the Western-backed government of President Hamid Karzai and a 130,000-strong US-led Nato force.

Pranab first Bangalee president

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top constitutional post and succeed Pratibha Patil, India's first woman head of state.

As the counting of votes in the July 19 presidential elections ended yesterday evening, Mukherjee polled more than half of the electoral college votes comprising members of Parliament and legislative assemblies in the states.

Mukherjee got a vote value of 7,13,763 votes against Sangma's 3,15,987, out of a total vote value of nearly 11 lakh.

A total of 748 members of parliament voted in the election. Of the total votes, Mukherjee got 527 votes while Sangma 206. Fifteen votes, including that of Samajwadi Party Chief Mulayam Singh Yadav, were declared invalid.

Mukherjee secured a huge lead even in the north eastern states where Sangma had used his tribal identity as a main plank during his campaign.

Soon after it was clear that Mukherjee's lead had become unassailable, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, his wife Gurcharan Kaur, Congress Chief Sonia Gandhi and her son Rahul drove to the former finance minister's residence in central Delhi and felicitated him.

West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress Chief Mamata Banerjee also congratulated him over phone on his victory in the presidential polls.

Banerjee had opposed Mukherjee's candidacy before finally announcing the support of Trinamool Congress for him just two days before the election.

Reacting to his victory, Mukherjee said, "I express my deep gratitude and thank the people of this great country for conferring this distinction by electing me to this high post.

"I have received much more from the people, parties, Parliament than I have given them... I will try to justify this," he said.

Sangma, at a press conference here yesterday evening, congratulated Mukherjee on his presidential election victory but said the country "has lost a golden opportunity to elevate a tribal to the highest constitutional post".

He said although the president of India is believed to be above all politics, the process of this year's presidential elections has not

been above political bias. Sangma alleged the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) had secured the support of ruling parties in states through financial promises and inducements.

Celebrations broke out at Mukherjee's ancestral house at Mirati village in West Bengal's Birbhum district, Kolkata, and his official residence in New Delhi.

People gathered near Mukherjee's ancestral house watching news of the vote count on TV channels. Some beat drums, carried big cut-outs of Mukherjee and danced in joy, distributed sweets, sprayed colours and set off fire crackers.

Mukherjee's election to the president's office marked a new journey for a man who had been out-and-out a politician on the back of experience gained in his 45-year-long innings in government and party.

Till recently the political troubleshooter of the UPA for the last eight years, he is considered an expert in the working of the Constitution and governance and known for adhering to rules.

PROFILE
The veteran Congressman, known for his sharp memory, became a Rajya Sabha member for the first time in 1969. He first held a ministerial office in 1973 at the age of 34 as deputy minister in charge of industrial development.

He has held several key positions in the last four decades except for the first four years of the Rajiv Gandhi period (1984-1987) when he was in virtual wilderness.

He was defence minister (2004-2006), external affairs minister (1995-96 and 2007-2009).

Never a politician with a mass base, Mukherjee was for a long time member of the Rajya Sabha before his first direct election to the Lok Sabha in 2004 from Jangipur in Murshidabad district of West Bengal.

He repeated his victory at the 2009 elections but had expressed a desire not to contest elections again in view of his advancing age.

Mukherjee had his own bad days in the Congress which he had to quit in the mid 1980s after he had evinced interest in becoming prime minister following the assassination of Indira Gandhi in October, 1984.

He launched his public life in the 1960s in the Bangla Congress during the time of the late West Bengal chief minister Ajoy Mukherjee of

the United Front government when Jyoti Basu was deputy chief minister. He was general secretary of the Bangla Congress.

A post-graduate in political science and history, Mukherjee can recollect any event of historical importance or mundane political and other events, a matter of envy to many of his colleagues.

Son of a senior Congress leader Kinkar Mukherjee from West Bengal, Pranab Mukherjee had a brief stint as a lawyer, teacher and journalist before he came into electoral politics in 1969.

Mukherjee has five books published to his credit on political and economic issues; and under his editorial guidance, the history of the Congress was published in which there was a candid admission of excesses during the emergency.

He got the best Parliamentary Award in 1997. Ten years later in 2007, the Padma Vibhushan followed.

Israeli sets self on fire days after burns victim dies

AFP, Jerusalem

A wheelchair-bound Israeli was in serious condition yesterday after setting himself on fire just hours before the funeral of a man who had set himself alight during a social justice protest on July 14.

"A man in a wheelchair set himself on fire at a bus stop near Yehud" near Tel Aviv, police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld told AFP.

"Passersby put out the flames. The man, in his late forties, was in serious condition, he was taken to the Sheba hospital in Tel HaShomer," he said.

Sunday's apparent self-immolation, carried out by a man who is reportedly a disabled Israeli army veteran, took place just hours before the funeral of Moshe Silman.

Silman died on Friday, six days after setting himself ablaze at a Tel Aviv social justice demonstration. In a letter he read out before setting himself alight, he accused the Israeli establishment of "taking from the poor and giving to the rich."

Over a thousand Israelis held vigils for Silman in Tel Aviv and other Israeli cities on Saturday night.

Iran atomic chief pours cold water on n-ship idea

AFP, Tehran

Iran's atomic chief yesterday undercut an idea put forward by some lawmakers to make nuclear-powered submarines and ships, even though he claimed Tehran had the technology to do so later if it wished.

The comments by Fereydoon Abbasi Davani, head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation, as reported by the news agency ISNA, poured cold water on a recent draft bill by some Iranian parliamentarians that seeks to give Tehran a reason to produce high-enriched uranium.

"We don't have a plan right now in this area," Abbasi Davani was quoted as saying.

He asserted, though, that "we do have the ability to design such reactors for ships" if a decision was made to go in that direction.

Enrichment is at the heart of the showdown between Iran and the West over Tehran's nuclear programme.

Russia arrests officials after deadly floods

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday announced the arrest of three local officials for negligence during flooding that killed 172 people and politically undermined President Vladimir Putin as he took up his third term.

The Investigative Committee revealed the surprise detentions during a lightning visit to the devastated Black Sea village of Krymsk by Putin's powerful domestic security master mind Alexander Bstrykin.

The three Krymsk officials and a nearby town mayor now face seven years in prison -- a sentence rarely seen in such cases and one stressing the urgency Putin attaches to the first big disaster to strike since his May return.

Tea garden

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of Bangladesh Cha Sramik Jono Goshtthi (CSJG), speakers at a rally held at Amu Tea Garden announced yesterday.

The tea labourers of 40 tea gardens in Lashkarpur and Balisera Valley areas already announced a strike for today.

CSJG President Moni Sankar Karmaker and General Secretary Gopen Tontubai, among others, addressed the rally.

Police filed the case accusing the two after recovering 175 bottles of Indian liquor, eight kgs of cannabis and 12 cans of beer from Amu Tea Garden on March 1 this year.

Influenced by some political leaders, police filed a charge sheet against the leaders on April 9, the speakers alleged.

'Starving'

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out again making villagers scared.

"The position of the tiger remains unchanged for the past three days," said Md Alauddin, Kaikhali forest station officer of West Sundarbans.

Panic-stricken villagers along with members of the forest department have been guarding the area closely to prevent the tiger from entering the village.

The tiger, however, looked frail and did not show the slightest inclination to pounce on goats grazing around it in the morning, said Kiron Mondal, a villager.

Forest department officials have been trying to tranquilise the tiger since yesterday for the purpose of medical treatment.

"We haven't been able to tranquilise the tiger yet as it might fall into the water and drown," said Alauddin. Some villagers, however, alleged that the forest department officials deliberately delayed making the decision as they suspect that the tiger was about to die.