

Cabinet okays changes to birth, death registration act

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The cabinet yesterday approved the draft of the "Birth and Death Registration (Amendment) Act, 2012" keeping provisions of both fine and jail for denial of information or providing false information.

The amendment was required to preserve birth and death registration information digitally with a 17-digit personal identification number, said Cabinet Secretary M Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan.

Briefing reporters after the cabinet meeting, he said the need to preserve info digitally has arisen due to increased use of information technology in government work.

According to the amendments, the expatriate Bangladeshis will be able to register birth and death at diplomatic missions abroad, Musharraf added. He said those who will deny providing information or give false information will be fined Tk 500 to Tk 5,000 or will serve no more than 15 days of simple imprisonment.



A woman is being helped by some men onto the roof of an overcrowded train. Ahead of Eid, people are desperate to return home even by travelling on train roofs putting their lives at stake. The photo was taken at Chittagong Railway Station when Chandpur-bound Meghna Express was standing at the platform yesterday.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

JS COMMITTEE MEETINGS Public Accounts Committee hits a century

RASHIDUL HASAN

In a rare achievement, a parliamentary body held its 100th meeting yesterday, becoming the most functional and sincere committee in the history of the country's House of Nation.

When many of the 48 parliamentary bodies fail to hold the minimum number of meetings, Public Accounts Committee (PAC) completed holding a hundred meetings.

According to rules of procedure of Jatiya Sangsad, each parliamentary committee was to hold at least 33 meetings, once a month, till December 2011.

Records show the parliamentary standing committees on the ministries of health, CHT affairs, water resources, and communications, among others, failed in this regard.

In addition, half of the parliamentary committees on different ministries have not sat regularly in the last three years. There are even some JS committees, including Petition Committee, which have not held a meeting at all.

A vital committee of Jatiya Sangsad, the PAC has almost cleared all backlogs of government's audit objections since 1972.

According to the PAC and parliament secretariat sources, no other JS committee

since 1973 has held a hundred meetings like Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir-led PAC.

Moreover, two different sub-committees of the PAC led by Ali Ashraf and Khan Tipu Sultan held over 55 meetings separately.

Expressing his rejoice, Ali Ashraf, a member of PAC, said the committee had been able to dispose of almost all audit backlogs of the committee from 1972-73 to 2007-08.

"The committee today [yesterday] asked the Comptroller and Auditor General to complete the audit report of the present government as of now and submit it to the PAC."

Khan Tipu Sultan, another PAC member, said there were days when they held meeting almost every day in a week.

PAC lambastes Central Bank The PAC yesterday criticised Bangladesh Bank top officials for what it said BB's overlooking in the public money "looting" by Hallmark Group and five other companies from state owned Sonali Bank.

The committee asked the Central Bank to take punitive actions against the perpetrators and bring financial discipline in banking sector.

The Anti-Corruption Commission is investigating Sonali Bank's illegal lending of Tk 3,547 crore to Hallmark Group and five other companies, and the people involved in the scam.

3 held with Yaba tablets in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

At least 11,305 pieces of Yaba tablet were seized and three youths were arrested in a drive by Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) on Naf river near Teknaf border area in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

The arrestees were Abul Hashem, 22, Nur Hossain, 20, and Abdullah, 18, all residents of Moulvipara in Teknaf.

A team from BGB 42 battalion of Teknaf Border Outpost (BOP), headed by Habildar Arad Ali, stopped an engine boat on Naf river while conducting a drive around 7:30am, said Lt Col Zahid Hasan, commanding officer of BGB 42 battalion.

BGB personnel found the three youths aboard the boat along with the Yaba tablets, he said. They seized the drugs along with the boat.

During primary interrogation, the arrestees confessed that they were transporting the Yaba consignment from Myanmar into Bangladesh as per the order of one Abdul Gani, said BGB officials.

Nine killed in road accidents

METRO DESK

Nine people were killed and eight others injured in road accidents in Dhaka, Pabna, Magura, Madaripur, Thakurgaon, Panchagarh, Chittagong and Mymensingh on Monday and yesterday.

Our staff correspondent reports, two people were killed and five others injured in road accidents in the capital yesterday.

In an incident, bus helper Mohammed Raju, 25, was killed as two buses collided in Farmgate area around 9:00am yesterday.

In another incident, rickshaw puller Abdul Motin, 36, was killed and five others were injured as a car rammed into some rickshaws in Mirpur area around 5:00pm yesterday.

Our Pabna correspondent reports, agriculture officer Md Asadullah, 34, was killed on the spot as a bus hit his motorcycle on Bogra-Nagarbahi highway in Amaikola area of Santhia upazila in Pabna yesterday.

BSS reports from Magura, two students were killed in a road accident on Magura-Jessore highway in Shalikhia upazila in Magura yesterday.

Police said Sohail Molla, 14, and Biswajit Biswas, 15, were killed as a truck hit their bicycle from behind around 8:00am.

Our Madaripur correspondent reports, college student Yakub Hasan Rabbi, 16, was killed as a bus hit his motorcycle on

Dhaka-Barisal highway in Alamdosta area in Rajoir upazila in Madaripur yesterday.

Our Thakurgaon correspondent reports, three people were killed and another was injured in road accidents in Thakurgaon and Panchagarh on Monday and yesterday.

In an incident, a motorcyclist Mishu, 16, was killed and his fellow Shaju, 14 was injured in a road accident on Boda-Marea road at Nayadighi village in Boda upazila in Panchagarh yesterday.

In another incident, Bikash, 12, and Ripon, 6, were killed in an accident on Panchagarh-Thakurgaon highway in Thakurgaon sadar upazila on Monday.

Our staff correspondent from Chittagong reports, a journalist was injured in a road accident on Chittagong-Dhaka highway in Mirsarai upazila in Chittagong yesterday.

Fakhrul Islam Reaz, 25, a correspondent of the daily Janakantha in the upazila, was injured as a bus hit his motorcycle around 3:30pm.

Reaz was rushed to Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

Our Mymensingh correspondent reports, Sultan Uddin Ahmed, 45, was injured as a train hit his private car in Kewatkhali area in Mymensingh sadar around 4:00pm yesterday.

Sultan was rushed to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

Where lies the truth?

FROM PAGE 1

the story in the most libellous ways with headlines suggesting that Yunus himself had benefited from this alleged scam. He was termed a bloodsucker and articles started coming up in newspapers about how 'thousands of poor women were exploited' with microcredit; how ineffective microcredit is and how people 'committed suicide' because they were so 'heavily indebted'.

Just when that special quarter was gleefully basking in the glory of having punched a hole in the reputation of Yunus and Grameen Bank, the Norwegian government came up with a statement that Grameen had not embezzled the donor's funds or used the money for unintended purposes.

This was further strengthened by the Nobel Committee's statement that it had awarded Yunus and Grameen the Peace Prize after it had pieced their "larger and very positive picture together".

But by then the government had started probing the allegations made in the documentary.

Simultaneously, it found a loophole --- that Yunus had violated the bank's retirement age of 60 since he was already 71. So Bangladesh Bank removed him as the managing director.

Yunus tried to fight his case in the court which he subsequently lost on the argument that he had no 'locus standi' in the case, as Dr Kamal Hossain, Yunus' lawyer, has pointed out.

So, the first step of maligning and removing him from the bank was complete. Then started the second phase.

The government started claiming that Grameen Bank is a government organisation, that it is a government bank. No matter how gross that claim is, everyone

from the top level to the bottom of the Awami League and the government started harping on the same false claim.

A look at the structure, function and formation of the Grameen Bank and comparing it with other banks makes the fallacy of such a statement clear.

First, Grameen is not a conventional bank at all. It does not function like a regular commercial bank. One cannot open an account and deposit money in it. Nor does it issue cheques. One cannot import and export goods through it. It does not give term loans for industrialisation.

What it does is give small loans to poor women. The women form groups and become members of Grameen Bank and get loans on the understanding of mutual responsibility. And then they pay back on small weekly installments.

So this unusual nature of the bank made it necessary to frame a different set of rules and procedures for Grameen. Its operations and structure could not be covered by the Bank Company Act, which governs all other commercial banks.

For this very reason, the government in 1983 promulgated the Grameen Bank Ordinance and turned the microfinance institution into a statutory body. But this promulgation of the law does not make it a government-owned bank in anyway.

The poor borrowers, mainly women, are the majority shareholders of Grameen with the government holding a small share of 3 percent, reduced from the initial 25 percent. This minority shareholding does not make it a government-owned bank either. Had it been the case, then IFIC Bank, which is a private bank by all means, would have been regarded as a government-

owned entity because the government holds over 30 percent of its share and three government nominated directors sit on its board. Similarly, Bangladesh Commerce Bank would be one. In fact, when the first generation private banks were allowed, all of them had government shares.

So the government has been trying to claim it as a 'government bank' from the beginning. And the cabinet just recently approved a proposal to amend the Grameen Bank Ordinance, giving full power to the Grameen Bank chairman to pick the managing director of the microfinance institution.

This is the penultimate move that the government made to take full control of Grameen because the Grameen board had been resisting any move by the government to place a managing director of its own choice.

Compare this with the current practice in the Grameen Bank. The over 8 million poor women who are the owners of the bank practice full democracy and elect the nine board members among themselves. They have a full say in the policy matters of the bank.

So when Yunus was fearing government takeover, he actually meant this kind of control over the bank, not ownership control.

This move is so strong that even the international community has expressed concern over the control motive and urged the government not to jeopardise the autonomy of the bank.

Now it is up to the reader to judge whether all these steps initiated by the government give credence to the fear expressed by Yunus and all friends and well wishers of Grameen Bank that the government is zeroing in on Grameen to take control of it.

Bangabandhu's men

FROM PAGE 1

ago. The plotters had done their heinous work meticulously. In the three days preceding the coup d'etat, Khondokar Moshtaque Ahmed, the commerce minister; Taheruddin Thakur, the minister of state for information; Mahbub Alam Chashi, a former government official; and ABS Safdar, chief of National Security Intelligence, met over a series of sessions at Comilla BARD. Early in the morning of August 15, all of them were seen in Dhaka, cheerfully taking over the country.

As many as four hours elapsed after the pogrom at Dhanmondi, good enough time for the army to have acted against the coup leaders. No action came.

Moshtaque took over as president in a clear violation of the constitution. Soon, army chief Shafiullah, air force chief A K Khondokar and navy chief MH Khan would swear allegiance to him.

A cabinet meeting was called, with nearly every minister being present. Some, like the elderly Phani Bhushan Majumdar, were compelled to be there. Phani was seized from PG Hospital, where he was undergoing treatment, and transported to the Bangabhaban.

There is no record of any discussion of the pre-dawn tragedy having taken place. Moshtaque focused on the kind of national dress he

thought should be prescribed for the country. He had his own attire in mind.

Once Bangabandhu had been dispensed with, General MAG Osmany, who had bravely resigned from the Jatiya Sangsad in January 1975 in protest against the formation of Baksal, had no qualms becoming Moshtaque's defence adviser. He would remain in that position till Moshtaque's ouster three months later.

Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, a former president who had been inducted into the cabinet by Bangabandhu on August 8, was appointed foreign minister in succession to Dr Kamal Hossain, who had been abroad on an official tour and refused to come back home in the new circumstances.

Among those who suddenly found themselves in positions of influence in the Moshtaque cabal were KM Obaidur Rahman, Shah Moazzam Hossain, Nurul Islam Manzur and Taheruddin Thakur.

The new regime, dominated by the majors and colonels who had assassinated Bangabandhu and his family and others, moved swiftly to place vice president Syed Nazrul Islam, former finance minister Tajuddin Ahmed, prime minister M Mansoor Ali and home Minister AHM Quamruzzaman under detention. They were soon

carted off to Dhaka central jail, where they were murdered in cold blood on November 3, 1975.

Within a fortnight of the coup, General Shafiullah was replaced as army chief by General Ziaur Rahman, his deputy. Air Vice Marshal AK Khondokar was succeeded by M G Tawab, a religious fanatic and once of the Pakistan air force and living in Germany.

In subsequent years, Shafiullah would serve under Zia and General HM Ershad as ambassador and high commissioner to various countries before eventually joining the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League and becoming a parliamentarian in 1996.

AK Khondokar too would serve as a diplomat in a number of countries under Zia and Ershad. He joined the latter's government as a minister and later joined the Awami League under Sheikh Hasina.

It is intriguing to recall what some of the men around Bangabandhu did after his assassination.

Mohammadullah, who served as deputy speaker and then as speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad, took over as the country's president after Abu Sayeed Chowdhury's resignation in late 1973. In early 1975, he became a minister in Bangabandhu's new cabinet. After August 15, he linked up, first, with Moshtaque and then with

Zia. He became President Sattar's vice president only a day before General Ershad ousted the government in a coup on March 24, 1982.

Prof Yusuf Ali, who read out the Proclamation of Independence at Mujibnagar in April 1971 and then served as education minister in Bangabandhu's government, happily joined Moshtaque. In a later phase, he joined the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and was forgotten by the country.

Obaidur Rahman would become part of the BNP and Shah Moazzem would link up with the Jatiya Party and become Ershad's deputy prime minister. Much later, he would join Khaleda Zia's BNP.

Another prominent Awami Leaguer, M Korban Ali, minister for information in Bangabandhu's government, would work closely with Sheikh Hasina before deserting her and joining the Ershad regime.

Abdul Malek Ukil, speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad, told newsmen at London's Heathrow airport soon after August 15 that Mujib's overthrow had been the fall of a pharaoh. Senior Awami League politician Mohiuddin Ahmed travelled to Moscow as Moshtaque's emissary to seek the support of the Soviet leadership for the new regime.

Tofail Ahmed, political

Golam Mohammad new envoy to Greece

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT



The government has decided to appoint Golam Mohammad, currently serving as Bangladesh ambassador to Indonesia, as the new ambassador to Greece.

A career diplomat, Golam earlier served as Bangladesh ambassador to Jordan and consul general of Bangladesh in Dubai.

He also served the Bangladesh High Commission in Canberra, Bangladesh Deputy High Commission in Karachi and Bangladesh Embassy in Cairo.

Death anniversary

Staff Correspondent



Tomorrow is the ninth death anniversary of Ameenah Mashur Rahman, former women affairs secretary of Bhashani NAP and a social worker.

On the occasion, a Qurankhwani and milad mahfil will be held tomorrow at her Sunderkhata village home in Nilphamari. A food distribution programme among the orphans will also be held in the capital.

Her relatives, friends and well-wishers are requested to pray for the departed soul.

Ameenah, wife of former minister Mashur Rahman, died of cardiac arrest in 2003.

Hasan Iqbal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Today is the second death anniversary of Hasan Iqbal, a language movement veteran and former assistant editor of the Dainik Ittefaq.

On the occasion, a doa and milad mahfil will be held at Borobagh Jame Mosque at Mirpur Section-2 in the capital after Asr prayers and followed by a iftar party after Maghrib prayers, says a press release.

secretary to the Father of the Nation, would be arrested by the regime and subjected to indignities. Like him, there were others.

Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani welcomed the change-over. Only months earlier, in March 1975, he had welcomed Bangabandhu to his home at Santosh, Tangail, and told him he was on the right path.

Moshtaque, who would go to prison in Zia's times, died a few months before Sheikh Hasina led the Awami League back to power in 1996. Before his death, in a rambling interview with a weekly journal, he said he had had no hand in Bangabandhu's killing and that he treated Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana as his own daughters.

Chashi died in mysterious circumstances in the deserts of Saudi Arabia.

Thakur went to prison over the jail killings of November 1975, was freed, and died sometime later in disgrace.

Osmany would contest the presidential election in June 1978 as a joint opposition candidate, lose to Zia and then form his Janata Party. He died in the early 1980s, in the Ershad period.

The stories could go on and on.

Thus have the chronicles of a dark era, tainted with blood and painted in the lurid colours of shame, come down to the country.