

BNP demands

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Now Hallmark scam has been unveiled. With due respect I am urging the finance minister to resign," said BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir.

He was addressing a meeting yesterday at the National Press Club organised by Doctors' Association of Bangladesh (DAB), a pro-BNP organisation.

At another programme held at the party's central office at Naya Paltan in the capital, Fakhrul reminded the audience of what former finances minister Saifur Rahman did.

"Saifur Rahman introduced reform in Bangladesh economy. It is hard to find a finance minister like him," he said while addressing a programme to mark the third death anniversary of the former finance minister.

The BNP leader hoped that his party chairperson Khaleda Zia would be able to find a competent finance minister like Saifur Rahman, if voted to power.

Bangladesh's longest-serving Finance Minister Saifur Rahman died in a road crash on September 5, 2009 on the Dhaka-Sylhet highway. He had placed 12 national budgets before the Parliament as finance minister during the tenures of late president Ziaur Rahman and former prime minister Khaleda Zia.

Saifur, however, challenged Khaleda's leadership after the 1/11 change-over in 2007 and since then he was identified as a "reformist" in the party.

Bangladesh slips

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touch 118 out of 144 countries in the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) 2012-13, said the World Economic Forum (WEF) in its annual Global Competitiveness Report published yesterday.

Last year, Bangladesh ranked 108 in GCI, said the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD). The report was unveiled in favour of the WEF at the CPD office in the capital.

The report has been prepared on the basis of a survey among 14,000 industrialists and businessmen and included 87 medium and large companies of Bangladesh.

This is the third year in a row that Bangladesh has lost its competitive edge since 2009-10, when the country jumped five positions. In 2003-04, Bangladesh's rank slipped by 24 steps.

"Despite Bangladesh's falling ranking in the past years, its overall score was rising. This year, the country's score in competitiveness has also fallen," said CPD Senior Research Fellow Khondaker Golam Moazzem while presenting the report.

CPD Distinguished Fellow Debapriya Bhattacharya and its Executive Director Prof Mustafizur Rahman also spoke at the occasion.

Citing local entrepreneurs, the CPD said businesses found inadequate infrastructure, corruption and lack of access to finance emerging as the top three problematic factors in doing business here. Rising worries about political instability was another problematic factor for doing business.

"The financial market was at a disastrous state in 2012," said Moazzem, because of a deterioration in the sophisti-

cation of banks' performance, weak monitoring and supervision of banking and security markets, and difficulty in getting loans.

Businesses, however, saw lesser threats of terrorism and organised crime when there was deterioration in the business environment.

The findings also state that 75 percent of the respondents felt the judiciary was being influenced by members of the government, citizens or firms. "Public trust in ethical standards of politicians is very low," said Moazzem.

"Undocumented extra payments or bribes from one private firm to another are common to secure business," said the CPD, quoting the report. As many as 67 percent respondents believed that bribing for favourable decisions was common.

Business perceptions about the economic growth in 2012 also weakened compared to 2011 due to falling confidence, the report said.

Debapriya said the erosion of the country's competitiveness indicated a fall in the momentum of advancement.

"It shows signs of rift in that momentum of the country's progress," he said, citing corruption, fund crunch for investment, weak regulation and supervision in the financial and capital market, and weakness in economic stability as obstacles to development.

"Problems which were minor in the past are becoming larger along with the existing big problems," he said.

On electricity, the report said though supply improved marginally despite huge investment and tariff revisions, it remained at a "less than expected level". Inflation also pushed up the production cost of factories.

Crash kills 2 university students

A CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

Two students of Jessore Science and Technology University (JSTU) were killed when a bus rammed their motorbike on Jessore-Jhenidah highway in Sadar upazila of Jessore yesterday morning.

The deceased are Ali Rana, a third-year student of Environmental Science and Health Management and Asrafun Siddiqua Shoshi, a second-year student of the same department.

Golam Rahman, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, said Garai paribahan, the Jessore-bound bus, rammed the motorbike on its way to the university around 9:40am. Shoshi died on the spot.

Locals rushed Rana to Jessore Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead.

As the news spread, JSTU students blocked the highway and the Jessore-Chaugachha road, halting vehicular movements for more than five hours.

Witnesses said the students also vandalised around 20 vehicles at Churamonkathi intersection, about five kilometres from the university, and set the bus counter on fire.

Mokles ur Rahman, an employee of the university, said police fired rubber bullets and charged batons leaving two students injured.

Rebels seek unity as Syria troops batter Aleppo

AFP, Damascus

Rebels fighting to oust Syria's President Bashar al-Assad yesterday announced plans to reform and stem the proliferation of militias, as they came under artillery and aerial attack on multiple fronts.

Assad himself came under renewed diplomatic fire from Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who said Syria had become a "terrorist state," and from Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, who told him to go.

Forces loyal to the embattled president again trained their heavy weapons on second city Aleppo, where the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said 30 people, including seven children, were killed yesterday.

In its latest toll, the watchdog said at least 90 people were killed nationwide yesterday -- 64 civilians, 12 soldiers and 14 rebels.

The Observatory said fighter jets bombed zones

controlled by the rebel Free Syrian Army (FSA) in the northern city while ground troops simultaneously unleashed a barrage of shells.

Aleppo has been the target of a five-week-old government offensive aiming to dislodge the rebels who took over swathes of the commercial capital in July.

Relentless bombardments and food shortages have been reported in zones still held by the rebels, a rag-tag army of military defectors and civilians who have taken up weapons.

A rebel general yesterday said that the FSA would soon adopt changes aimed at overcoming divisions and addressing the growing number of militias fighting on its behalf.

Following talks due to end in around 10 days, the FSA would go by the name of the Syrian National Army, General Mustafa al-Sheikh, head of the military council grouping rebel chiefs, told AFP.

Several blasts were

heard in the Damascus district of Jubar as it came under heavy bombardment, and explosions were also heard in Yalda just south of the city, the watchdog said.

In the central city of Homs, the rebel bastion of Khaldiyeh came under fierce mortar fire, and three children were killed when regime forces bombarded the Ariha area in Homs province.

UN and Arab League peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi said on Tuesday that the death toll in the country was "staggering" and the destruction "catastrophic."

The Algerian former foreign minister, who took up his post on Saturday, also warned the situation across Syria was "deteriorating steadily."

The Observatory, which relies on a network of activists on the ground, says more than 26,000 people have been killed in Syria since the revolt erupted in March 2011. The UN says about 20,000 have died.

Khaleda starts district tours from Sept 20

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia will start her district-tours from September 20 to drum up support for restoring the caretaker government system to oversee the next general elections.

Besides, 27 teams comprised of the party's senior leaders will carry out the campaign across the country from September 7 to 30. During the campaign, they will hold public meetings at district and upazila headquarters and lead processions.

Khaleda would address some of the meetings in district headquarters, said party Joint Secretary Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, adding that they had already finalised the schedule for four meetings.

According to the schedule, she will address a rally in Dinajpur on September 20, in Rajbari on September 29, in Habiganj on October 4, and in Barisal on October 9.

Although the party chairperson had threatened to declare tougher agitation programme after the Eid-ul-Fitr from a rally in the capital on June 11, BNP later backtracked from the plan.

The party standing committee has recently decided to conduct a mass campaign before going for a solid agitation against the government.

All 6 chairmen

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Ahmad, chairman of Palli Karma-Sahaya Foundation, was also extended by two years, the notification said.

The boards of the six banks were constituted soon after the Awami League-led alliance government took office more than three years ago, and their tenures were to expire on September 9.

A number of AL men were given posts on the boards, which sparked severe criticism from different quarters. Even the central bank warned the government about their performance several times.

But Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday said he did not think the board members were picked on political considerations.

"The bad people involved [in irregularities] have to be punished. Some members are bad, but I do not know them. We have to identify and punish them," he told reporters at the secretariat.

Following the revelation of the Hall-Mark loan scam, the BB in a letter to the finance minister recommended that the government reconstitute the board of Sonali Bank.

Speaking on the issue, Muhith said: "We have been in the process of restructuring these boards for a month."

On probable changes in the boards, he said, "Some will retain their places while some will go."

EXTENSION SLAMMED
Analysts were alarmed at the "wholesale extension" of the tenure of the chairmen, saying the performance of these financial institutions in most cases was below expectation.

Akbar Ali Khan, former caretaker government adviser, said: "It is not wise to extend the tenure in a wholesale manner. It should be done based on the boards' performance."

"Those who have performed well should get extension, but there should not be any extension in banks where performance has not been good," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

The former finance secretary added that such moves would not help improve banks' performance.

"If the boards of the banks and their chief executives cannot work properly, then the situation at these banks will worsen further. Improving governance at these banks should be one of the top priorities of the finance ministry," he noted.

Uncle testifies

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also said Babul's two siblings, who are yet to reach 40, stayed home during the Liberation War in 1971 causing the prosecution beaming.

In his 30-to-40-minute-long deposition Razzak said Babul is the eldest among three sons of his eldest sister Safia Khatun, who may be above 85.

In response to a question of a defence counsel, Razzak said, "I came to the tribunal to give true deposition for Sayedee Saheb (sir)."

"During the Liberation War in 1971, no Pakistan army or Razakar went to my nephew Abdul Halim Babul's house. There was no looting. None set fire. No such things happened," said Razzak who is now 65.

"Babul came to this court and gave untrue testimony," Razzak said, adding, his nephew was eight or nine during the War.

The defence witness said about one year ago he learned that his nephew would give testimony against Sayedee.

Razzak claimed his sister also forbade Babul to give testimony against Sayedee.

"Don't give untrue testimony against such a good person," said Razzak quoting Babul's mother.

Since Babul was persistent to give testimony against Sayedee, Safia Khatun became angry and left his house and moved away to live with her another son, the defence witness added.

Razzak said Safia requested him to give true deposition at the tribunal saying she herself would come to the tribunal to give testimony in favour of Sayedee if she were physically fit.

Razzak also said only one incident occurred during the War in Nalbania village. "At the middle of Ashwin (mid-September to mid-October), I heard a shot at dead of the night. I went north of my house. The body of Ibrahim Kutti was being carried on a boat through the canal adjacent to my village," he said.

Razzak said he saw Alam Choukidar, Aiub Ali Choukidar, Hakim Muni

on the boat which was going to Parerhaat.

The defence witness who stayed there for some moment also saw Danesh Mollah, Sekandar Sikdar, Moslem Moulana and Ruhul Amin Mamunina. "I also saw they were taking the wife of Aaju Hawladar and his son Saheb Ali to Parerhaat. Pakistan army later killed them in Pirojpur," he added.

Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim, who led the morning session in absence of tribunal's chairman Justice Md Nizamul Huq, then asked the prosecution to begin cross-examination.

At the beginning, prosecutor Syed Haider Ali drew the attention of the tribunal saying there were two names on the list of the defence counsel, but none of them was Abdur Razzak Akanda.

Jahangir Hossain asked the defence about the matter.

One of the defence counsels, Tajul Islam argued that they did not put the full name of the witness for security reasons. The person named Abdur Razzak on the list was actually this witness, he added.

The tribunal then began recording cross-examination with the objection of the prosecution and the defence's reply.

In reply to a question, Razzak said he came to give deposition upon request of Sayedee's brother-in-law Nanna.

The defence witness could not mention in which year his sister was married off and his age at the time of marriage.

Haider Ali asked whether he could mention the age of Babul's brothers -- Abdus Salam Bahadur and Abdul Karim Modhu.

Razzak said Bahadur is yet to reach 40, while Modhu will be 35.

"Where did they live during the Liberation War?" asked Haider Ali.

"They lived in the house during the Liberation War in 1971," Razzak replied.

The proceeding of the case was adjourned until today.

was not present at the tribunal.

Babul's deposition Babul in his seven-minute testimony on January 17 told the tribunal Sayedee along with other collaborators and Pakistani soldiers looted and torched his house in Pirojpur on June 2, 1971.

He was standing on the street in front of his house in Nalbania village when he heard that Pakistani soldiers and collaborators were approaching the area, he added.

"We used to live in fear of Pakistani soldiers and Razakars [collaborators]," said Babul, adding, "I entered my house and told everyone to leave."

"They [family members] went into hiding. So did I."

From a distance, they saw Delawar Hossain Sayedee, Danesh Mollah, Moslem Moulana and some other armed collaborators and Pakistani soldiers entering his house.

"They looted the house and set it ablaze," he said.

On that day at the tribunal, Babul accused the defence of intimidating him at his home in Pirojpur saying some 300 to 400 people went there and intimidated him.

He also pointed finger at the defence who were present at the tribunal that day.

Salahuddin Quader's case

The defence of war crimes accused BNP leader Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury yesterday cross-examined freedom fighter SM Mahbub-ul-Alam at the tribunal.

Mahbub gave deposition against the accused on August 28.

Mahbub said they hurled a grenade at Salahuddin Quader's car after the vehicle was damaged by bullets.

In reply to a question, Mahbub said magazine of a stengun contains about 28 bullets.

The proceeding of the case was adjourned until today.

Salauddin was produced before the court yesterday. He is facing 23 specific charges of crimes against humanity committed during the Liberation War.

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with fellow students on the campus.

Ovipriyo Chakrabarti, a student of the civil engineering department, said the students and Nahid at the meeting talked about bringing back Buet's glory and heritage. They would convey the details of the discussion to other students and decide their next move, he added.

A 16-member team of protesting students, accompanied by two teachers, around 4:00pm went for talks with the minister a day after the students, who were not satisfied with the decision taken at Monday's meeting between Nahid and Buet teachers, wished to express their thoughts before Nahid.

Receiving assurances on Monday from Nahid of the withdrawal of the pro-VC and the two cases filed against faculty members and students, Buet teachers decided to resume academic activities. But students wanted the removal of the VC too.

On April 7, Buet Teachers' Association launched an agitation, including work abstention, bringing 16 allegations of corruption against the VC and the pro-VC. But they suspended their agitation temporarily after the prime minister's assurances of fulfilling the demand.

Seeing no progress made on the issue, the teachers again announced non-stop work abstention from July 14. Students and staff of the university this time joined them.

After the three-hour-long meeting with the students yesterday, Nahid said the government would remain alert and take all measures to ensure that they could stay on the campus safely and continue their education without any obstruction.

"We will take a firm position against any allegation of irregularities, like an alteration in results of some students, and will also take action against any kind of administrative irregularity."

The minister also said that to implement the decision reached at Monday's meeting, steps had been taken to withdraw the cases and the summary of the pro-VC had been sent to the highest level of the government for his removal.

The teachers' association, meanwhile, at a meeting at

Jamaat used religion

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cross-examined Shahriar for two and a half hours and asked over 70 questions, mostly on the Jamaat and its former chief Ghulam Azam.

From a distance, they saw Delawar Hossain Sayedee, Danesh Mollah, Moslem Moulana and some other armed collaborators and Pakistani soldiers entering his house.

While giving his testimony on August 26, Shahriar appealed to the tribunal to try the Jamaat-e-Islami and its associate forces alongside the top leaders of these organisations for crimes against humanity during the Liberation War.

Yesterday, during the cross-examination, he said the party had played a vital role in turning Pakistan into an Islamic Republic although it was not in power between 1947 and 1970. Pakistan became an Islamic Republic through the constitution of 1956.

"The Jamaat did not make any statement against the Language Movement when the movement was on," said the defence counsel.

Shahriar, who is also executive president of Ekatturer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee, agreed with the defence on this point.

Responding to another question, Shahriar said the Dhaka University Students' Union had demanded that Bangla be made one of the state languages of Pakistan when it handed over a citation to Muhammad Ali Jinnah in 1948.

"It was Ghulam Azam, the then general secretary of the Dhaka University Students' Union, who read out the citation [at the meeting]," said defence counsel Mizanul.

"Yes, but he later regretted his involvement with the

movement," replied Shahriar.

"Do you have any footage or audio clips of Ghulam Azam regretting his involvement?" asked Mizanul.

"There was no opportunity for taking video footage then. What a stupid question!" Shahriar replied. The defence vehemently objected to the comment. Most among the team rose from their seats and started shouting in the courtroom angrily.

The prosecution counsels also were on their feet. The courtroom took a chaotic turn with both sides shouting for around five minutes, until the court intervened.

The witness and the defence later apologised to the court for such a situation.

Shahriar continued, "There was no opportunity for video recording then and I don't know whether there is any audio clip of Ghulam Azam's speech. It was published in then newspapers and is also in the writings of Badruddin Umar, chief researcher of the Language Movement."

"Can you tell us when and where Ghulam Azam delivered his speech?" the defence asked.

The witness replied that he needed to go through Badruddin Umar's book.

The defence then asked if Shahriar knew which newspaper had published Ghulam Azam's speech.

"As far as I can remember, Badruddin Umar quoted the event from Daily Azad," answered Shahriar.

At this, Mizanul Islam said the witness' claim about Ghulam Azam's speech was a part of his "continuous propaganda against the Jamaat-e-Islami and its leaders".

Shahriar denied the defence's claim just saying,

"It is not true."

"Haven't you and your organisation been waging a movement to ban the Jamaat-e-Islami and other parties formed on the basis of religious values," asked Mizanul.

"We have been moving against politics by fundamentalists, communalists and peddlers of religion. Religion is sacred to us and it should not be contaminated with politics. The Jamaat committed genocide and crimes against humanity in the name of religion in 1971," replied Shahriar.

He said the Nirmul Committee did not move against any political parties that believed in communism. Such a movement would go against the constitution and the spirit of the Liberation War. The communists also participated in the war of liberation in 1971, he added.

Replying to another question, he said, "We have verbally urged the Election Commission not to register the Jamaat-e-Islami as a political party because we think the party is comprised of killers and war criminals and does not obey Bangladesh's constitution."

The defence then asked Shahriar whether Jamaat lawmakers had violated the constitution when they took their oath as per the constitution in 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2008.

"I think they violated the constitution by taking the oath and this is its political hypocrisy, as according to its charter, the Jamaat-e-Islami is against Article 7 of the constitution," said Shahriar, adding that the constitution speaks about people's sovereignty which the Jamaat didn't believe in.

Jamaat Ameer Motiur

noon said teachers would resume their academic activities only after the government implemented the decision fully.

"The implementation process has already started and we believe that a quick implementation of the decision is possible. We want the government's intervention in this," Prof Ashrafur Islam, general secretary of the association, told The Daily Star.

Nahid said, "Buet is an institution to be proud of. We want here education without any obstruction and so will take whatever measure it demands."

It would be a great loss if the students lost a single hour out of their life, he said. "Therefore, we request them to return to their classes."

Rahman Nizami and Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed had become ministers in 2001 after taking oath as per constitution, said Mizanul. Then he asked the witness, "Did they work against the constitution?"

"I do not think they [Nizami and Mojaheed] worked in compliance with the constitution, as their behaviour towards me after my arrest [during the BNP-led coalition government] does not go with the oath they had taken," said the witness.

The defence then asked whether the colleagues of Nizami and Mojaheed had violated the constitution.

"No, because the BNP is not an anti-constitutional party as Jamaat is," said Shahriar.

Counsel Mizanul also asked whether the main principles of the constitution were changeable.

"No," was Shahriar's answer.

The three-member tribunal headed by Justice ATM Fazle Kabir adjourned the proceedings a few more questions later. The cross-examination of Shahriar Kabir will resume today.

Meanwhile, the same tribunal recorded the cross-examination of Amir Hossain Mollah, the ninth prosecution witness in the war crimes case against another Jamaat leader Abdul Quader Mollah.

The tribunal adjourned the case proceedings until September 10.

In his testimony on August 26, Amir Hossain, a wounded freedom fighter, said Quader Mollah along with then Pakistani army killed around 400 people of Alubdi near Mirpur in the capital on April 24, 1971.