

Free regulator, only

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ment must try to keep competent structural engineers, architects, planners, and electrical, geotechnical and plumbing engineers from going abroad for jobs.

Both Seraj and Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury said there must be coordination among service providers, as their works had been overlapping. They strongly spoke for elimination of such anomalies.

AHM Matiur Rahman, a former additional chief engineer of Department of Public Works, said there should be an awareness campaign to convince the people that it would not cost much if they built their buildings with proper designs from the certified professionals.

Taher Azad, assistant chief architect of Department of Architecture, said around 90 percent building drawings submitted to Rajuk were not made by certified professionals, but by draftsmen.

"We have to launch a major awareness programme," he said.

Ahsanul Haque Khan, chief architect of Department of Architecture, pointed out that the markets were flooded with substandard construction materials.

He also said high-rise buildings were being constructed on land meant for parks and gardens. "This should be looked at."

A number of speakers called for upgrading testing facilities at BSTI. They said a single window should be set up so that people need not to buzz about 20 places to obtain permission and services before constructing buildings.

Md Abu Sadeque, director of House Building Research Institute, said there

percent of its cultivable land to housing and industrialisation. "Proper land use policy is imperative in order to ensure food security. We have to implement the Detailed Area Plan (DAP)," he said.

Prof Hossain Ali of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), who led the BNBC updating team, said although the BNBC was in place for two decades buildings were collapsing killing hundreds of people.

"It means the BNBC has not been followed," he said.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said it was frustrating that perpetrators break building laws and get away with it each time and flourish, although there were scores of building-related laws in the country.

It is imperative to institute effective mechanism to ensure that the laws were enforced accordingly and exemplary punishment meted out to the violators, he added.

Prof Mehedi Ahmed Ansary of civil engineering department at Buet said a four-tier building regulation including independent commission, accredited professional bodies, training for professionals and updating of BNBC was vital for constructing safe buildings.

AMM Safiullah, vice-chancellor of Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology, said soil tests (geotechnical examination) of a building's foundation must be carried out only by a licensed professional.

Toufiq M Seraj, managing director of real estate builder Sheltech, said to create an adequate pool of professionals, the govern-

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Free body for execution of building code
- Policy on land use
- Regular update of codes
- Effective supervision
- Better BSTI facilities to test materials
- Coordination among service providers

FINDINGS

- Small outlay needed for following building code
- 90% designs given to Rajuk not made by certified experts
- Govt agencies, institutions don't follow building law
- Substandard building materials flood market



were many government agencies and public institutions that did not follow the building codes.

Kazi Anwar Ahmed, head of Dhaka corporate office of BSRM, among others, spoke at the discussion moderated by Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury.

Close shave

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Rayhan then tried to flee, but the police personnel captured him, and sent him to Kotwali Police Station.

The OC said Rayhan was brought under interrogation to dig out the cause of his entering Tonmoy's room.

Earlier, on August 10 night, Tonmoy Ahmed Moon, a student of civil engineering department of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, was allegedly stabbed by Shibir cadres at Palashbari upazila in Gaibandha.

Tonmoy, also a central committee member of Bangladesh Chhatra League, has actively been involved with the Shahbagh movement, which demands the death penalty for all war criminals and a ban on Jamaat-Shibir politics.

Hopes bleak

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be considered.

The BNP standing committee, on the other hand, has asked party Chairperson Khaleida Zia to give the government until the first week of September to restore the caretaker government system, scrapped in 2011.

The party's highest policy-making body came up with the suggestion at a meeting at Khaleida's Gulshan office last night.

AL MEET

At the meeting that lasted around four hours, the AL advisers asked Hasina to resolve intra-party feud at all levels, nominate deserving candidates for the next polls, start preparing election manifesto and admit and explain failures of the government.

They also recommended that the AL and its associated bodies project the

government's successes through billboards in upazilas and districts.

The meeting blasted Khaleida Zia for celebrating birthday on August 15, the national mourning day.

AL General Secretary Syed Ashraf Islam's Friday's comment that there was no scope for talks with the BNP on any issue was reflected in the advisers' meeting.

Hasina will meet today the central working committee, the party's highest decision-making body, to firm up its strategies.

BNP MEET

The BNP standing committee decided not to take up tough programmes like hartals and blockades as those might cause public support to go against the party.

It decided to step up party activities at the grassroots level and find out appropriate persons as candidates in the next polls, meeting

sources told The Daily Star.

The nearly three-hour meeting also discussed the US ambassador's talks with the opposition leader.

The main opposition party decided to take the movement for caretaker system to its peak in October when parliament is supposed to be dissolved.

However, some top BNP leaders pointed out that the grassroots now look forward to elections because they feel that the party is sure to bag majority seats even if the caretaker system is not restored.

They also believe it would be difficult for the government to rig elections in the face of enthusiasm at the grassroots, media alertness and the presence of observers.

Khaleida will meet the leaders of the BNP-led alliance today to reach a common ground for the movement.

Mugger

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officer-in-charge (OC) of Mirpur Police Station.

When they got off of a taxi, seven miscreants popped up with sharp weapons and robbed them of money and gold jewellery worth around Tk 3 lakh he said.

Hearing their screams, locals chased the gang. They caught three of the miscreants and beat them up, leaving them severely injured, he added.

Sohel was declared dead after he was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Two cases had been filed with Mirpur Police Station, one in connection with the robbery and consequent death of the robber and another under arms act as sharp weapons had been recovered from the robbers.

AL's alternatives

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Besides, the AL high-command is considering persuading components of the BNP-led 18-party alliance and some other parties like Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh and Gono Forum to take part in the polls.

The AL also plans to bring several BNP leaders in the elections as independent candidates.

"If the BNP cannot control rebels inside the party in local elections, how can it check party rebels in the national elections?" asked a key minister, preferring anonymity.

His view was echoed by another influential minister and several senior leaders of the ruling party.

According to these lead-

ers, the options are being considered to make the election credible to the international community if the BNP boycotts it for not being held under a non-party caretaker government.

Efforts would also be made by both the AL and the probable interim government to ensure casting of more than 50-55 percent votes so that the election results appear credible. The next elected government could then claim it has majority public support, say top AL leaders.

The main opposition party has repeatedly been saying that it would not take part in the next election if not held under a non-party caretaker government.

AL insiders say these alternatives are under consideration to ensure the continuation of democracy. The party would make all efforts for that.

"Election is the only means to keep the democratic process going. So, our prime target is to hold the election in due time no matter which party takes part or not," AL Organising Secretary AFM Bahauddin Nasim told The Daily Star.

He also said they were hopeful that the BNP would finally participate in the national election under a Hasina-led interim government.

Talking to The Daily Star, two senior AL leaders said efforts were being made to bring the BNP in the elections. The AL would continue persuading the BNP to take part in the polls, saying that the next election would be free, fair and credible, and the administration would not interfere or influence it.

The AL would try to convince the BNP, saying it did not interfere in any of more than 5,500 local body polls or by-elections held in the last four and a half years, and would not do so in the parliamentary polls either.

If the BNP is not convinced, the AL would then mobilise its leaders and workers across the country to resist the party so that it could not hinder or foil the polls.

Several AL leaders and lawmakers believe if the party could hold the elections and come to power again, other parties would not be able to topple the government.

Sufferings

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Transport workers put barricades at Charmatha intersection of Bogra town around 9:00am, protesting alleged toll collection by police.

They withdrew the blockade after three and a half hours upon assurances from local administration of remedial action. The blockade snapped road communications between Dhaka and 10 northern districts.

"It took me around 14 hours to reach Dhaka from Natore yesterday [Saturday], which is usually a five-hour trip," said garment worker Masud Rana.

"My bus moved very slowly all the way from Sirajganj to Dhaka," he added.

Many passengers, especially children, fell sick being trapped in the gridlock.

The traffic on the Dhaka-Tangail highway started easing around 12:00noon.

Elsewhere, a five kilometre-long tailback was created at Kawrakandi ferry ghat in Madaripur. Long strings of several hundred vehicles were seen at Daulatdia and Paturia ferry terminals.

Communications on Dhaka-Chittagong highway was almost normal, except for the jam at the Kanchpur-Jatrabari entry point to the capital. It took passengers around two and a half hours to reach Gulistan from the Kanchpur bridge, which is normally a 50-minute journey.

As the inter-district buses could not return to districts from the capital on time due to the traffic jam, hundreds of passengers waited for several hours at bus counters in different northern districts. Many even changed their tickets by deferring their trips by a day.

Highway police officials said broken down vehicles were the main reason for long tailbacks on highways. Besides, road accidents, careless driving and rainfall also contributed to it.

"When a vehicle breaks down on a highway, it becomes very difficult for us to reach there with a wrecker, because both the sides of the road get occupied by vehicles. In the meantime, the gridlock gets worse," said Asaduzzaman Miah, deputy inspector general of highway police.

Due to shortage of buses, many passengers travelled on the roofs of buses, pick-up vans and trucks to reach Dhaka.

NO RESPITE FOR TRAIN PASSENGERS

People travelling by trains also suffered a lot yesterday as train schedules collapsed due to excessive pressure of passengers.

"As there was a huge pressure of passengers at every station, trains stopped for at least 10 to 15 minutes at each stations. That is why, train schedules collapsed," said Sardar Shahdat Hossain, divisional railway manager.

Putting their lives at risk, launch passengers on the major river routes travelled on overcrowded vessels. All the launches at Barisal and Chandpur launch terminals were crammed with passengers by almost two to three times beyond their capacity.

Our correspondents from Tangail, Bogra, Gazipur, Munshiganj, Chandpur, Barisal and Madaripur contributed to this report.

Bombs hurled at SP's residence

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

Unidentified people hurled four cocktails at the official residence of the superintendent of police in the town's Octroy intersection last night.

Three motorcyclists hurled the cocktails, of which one went off at the residence of Bashir Ahmed, said Al Mamun, additional superintendent of police.

As the security guard at the residence opened fire, the three fled the scene, leaving the motorcycle behind, he added.

Police later recovered the three unexploded cocktails from the spot.

The SP was at home when the attack took place.

India, Iran eyeing to resolve oil tanker dispute

AFP, New Delhi

New Delhi and Tehran were Saturday working to resolve a dispute over the detention of an Indian oil tanker by Iranian naval guards for allegedly polluting sea waters in the Persian Gulf.

The Indian government-owned MT Dosh Shanti ship was on its way back to India from Iraq when it was stopped Tuesday by the Iranian authorities and taken to Bandar Abbas port.

Iraq attacks kill 12 security personnel

AFP, Baghdad

Gunmen killed 12 Iraqi policemen and soldiers yesterday while a truck bomb hit a southern port, the latest in a surge in violence that authorities have failed to curb.

Security forces have in recent weeks carried out some of their biggest operations since the 2011 withdrawal of US forces, but analysts and diplomats have said authorities have not addressed the root causes of the violence.

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has nevertheless vowed to press on with the campaign in a bid to combat Iraq's worst violence since 2008, and on Saturday the interior ministry's spokesman announced the killing of an alleged senior Al-Qaeda-linked militant.

In Saturday's deadliest attack, gunmen opened fire on an army post in the town of Madain, just southeast of Baghdad, in a pre-dawn strike that left five soldiers dead and three others wounded, police and a medical source said.

Among the dead was a lieutenant colonel. The gunmen fled after the attack, and security forces, who cordoned off the scene, launched a manhunt.

North of Baghdad, militants shot dead four police who were buying ice near the city of Tikrit.

Security forces often purchase large blocks of ice to distribute to nearby check-

points in order to cope with Iraq's sweltering summer heat.

In another attack north of the capital, gunmen killed three soldiers in the restive Muqadadiyah area of Diyala province.

And in the far south, a truck rigged with explosives blew up in the parking lot of the port of Umm Qasr, wounding three people and damaging a docked ship and several nearby trucks.

The port's operations were not affected, however, a spokesman said.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attacks, but Sunni militants linked to Al-Qaeda and opposed to the Shi'ite-led government frequently carry out attacks against security forces.

Suspected Boko Haram attack in north Nigeria kills 11

AFP, Maiduguri

Suspected Boko Haram Islamists have stormed a town in northeast Nigeria, opened fire on police and civilians and killed 11 people, residents and a local lawmaker told AFP Friday.

The attack happened late Thursday in the town of Damboa in Borno state, Boko Haram's stronghold and where Nigeria has imposed a state of emergency as it pursues an offensive against the insurgent group.

"The attack lasted until about midnight," said Adamu Isah, a student who lives in Damboa. He said groups of gunmen opened fire on police and civilians and that "11 people died."

He blamed the attack on "Boko Haram" fighters.

State lawmaker Ayamu Lawan Gwasha, who represents Damboa, confirmed the details, as did a local security official who requested anonymity.

Both Isah and the lawmaker spoke to reporters in Borno's capital Maiduguri, roughly 85 kilometres (52 miles) from Damboa. Both said they had fled to the capital after the attack.

Details were slow to emerge and the area military spokesman could not be reached for comment because of a phone blackout imposed by the military, an operational measure meant to block the Islamists from coordinating attacks.

The phones have been down in Borno since May, when the state of emergency was declared.

The lawmaker said the town had been on high alert since the weekend, when 47 people were killed in the town of Konduga, also in Borno state, in a brutal attack that targeted Muslim worshippers gathering for morning prayers.

"We raised the alarm" after Konduga, Gwasha told journalists, saying the heightened security presence in Damboa "has helped in reducing the magnitude of the attack."

The military has sought to portray Boko Haram as being on the defensive, claiming that the sweeping operation launched in May

has plunged the extremists into disarray with all their camps destroyed.

But a spate of recent deadly violence has raised doubts about the military's claims. With the phone network down, information about the operation has been difficult to verify and access to the northeast is restricted.

Boko Haram has said it is fighting to create a strict Islamic state in northern Nigeria, but much of its violence has targeted Muslims.

It has also killed Christians and frequently targeted the security services as well as other symbols of authority.

Some speculate the group has sought out soft targets as it has faced added military pressure. A brutal attack on a school in north-eastern Yobe state last month left 41 students dead.

But others counter that Boko Haram is simply demonstrating that it remains unhindered by the military assault, attacking a range of targets in different areas.

Odhikar's Hefajat list

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names and addresses had already been leaked as the law enforcers raided the Odhikar office on August 11 and confiscated office computers and laptops that contained information related to Odhikar's claim that 61 victims had died in the crackdown.

Since the raid, some of the victims' families have told Odhikar that they were being watched by law enforcers, Taskin Fahmina added.

Being concerned over their security, Odhikar has sent the list to the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Asian Human Rights Commission and Ain O Salish Kendra.

Since human rights organisations have field-level workers across the country, "we believe they will ensure that the human rights of the victims' families are not violated," Fahmina said, adding that Hameeda Hossain, chair of Ain O Salish Kendra, had also been given the list.

Hameeda Hossain told The Daily Star she had not received the list yet because of a technical problem in her e-mail account.

Asked whether Ain O Salish Kendra would share the list with the media, she said, "The list is not ours that we can share, if we get it at all."

About Hefajat's claim that it had given the list to Odhikar, as published in a Bengali daily yesterday, Taskin Fahmina said, "For purposes of investigation we talked to activists of Hefajate Islam and they gave us some names and addresses, but they did not give us any list as such."

She claimed that the list had been compiled through using more than one source.

On June 10, Odhikar published on its website a report titled, "Assembly of Hefajat-e Islam Bangladesh and Human Rights Violation", claiming that 61 people died in the early hours of May 6 when law enforcers flushed several thousands Hefajat activists out of Shapla Chattar in the capital's Motijheel.

Promising to hold a non-violent rally at Shapla Chattar to protest what Hefajat had called anti-religion write-ups by "atheist bloggers" and to press home its 13-point demand, including introduction of a blasphemy law, thousands

of its activists occupied the capital's commercial hub overnight on May 5 and destroyed properties at random.

Members of police, Rapid Action Battalion and Border Guard Bangladesh then flush them out in the early hours of May 6.

Odhikar's claim conflicts with the government estimate that 13 people died that day.

The findings of the mainstream electronic media and newspapers also disagree with Odhikar's report.

According to an investigation by The Daily Star, 18 men died in the unrest centering on Shapla Chattar.

When the information ministry asked Odhikar to give it the list, the organisation refused showing concern over the security of the victims' families.

Odhikar's Secretary Adilur Rahman Khan was arrested on August 10 on charges of posting false information and pictures on the website and thus tarnishing the image of the state, the government and the law enforcement agencies.

Hefajat on several occasions mentioned a much higher death figure but it never came up with any proof in support of its claim.

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