

Nuke energy

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Under the existing framework agreement, Russia would manage nuclear waste and provide training and logistics to help Bangladesh create efficient and skilled manpower to operate the plant, Hasina said.

When the present government came to power in 2009, the country generated around 3,200 MW of electricity, she said.

"Now, the nation generates around 6,675 MW power after the present government took many successful initiatives. Nearly 62 percent of people have now access to electricity," she told her audience.

Director General of Rosatom and former Russian premier Sergey Kirienko, who was present as special guest, said

Russia would deliver latest technologies to ensure safety of the project while the plant would provide cheaper and sustainable energy.

"Once the project is implemented, it would be resistant to natural disasters like earthquake and tsunami," he said, adding that the project would create job opportunities for around 7,000 people.

Kirienko also said Russia was currently implementing nine nuclear power plant projects in his country and 90 more in other countries.

The initiative to construct the nuclear power plant in Rooppur was first taken in 1961 by the then Pakistan government. Around 260 acres of land were acquired to construct a 60 MW nuclear power plant.

But there was no follow up on implementing the project. In 1974, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman made some headway in the project. But after his assassination, the project was stalled.

In 2011, the present government revived the project and signed a framework agreement with Russia.

Hasina, during her visit to Russia in January 2013, inked a formal deal to implement the project.

Planning Minister AK Khandker, State Minister for Science and Technology Yafes Osman, Chief of Department of Technological Cooperation of IAEA Oscar Akenu, among others, spoke at the function in Rooppur.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina lays the foundation stone of the first phase work of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant yesterday in Ishwardi, Pabna.

PHOTO: PID

US shutdown hits intel ops

AFP, Washington

Some 70 percent of employees in US intelligence have been furloughed in the government shutdown, the top US spy official said yesterday, calling the situation "damaging" to national security.

James Clapper, director of national intelligence, told a Senate panel that US spy agencies must adhere to a legal standard to keep on staff only employees who are dealing with "imminent" threats.

"The legal standard against which we make decisions about who is furloughed and who isn't is, and this is quoting from the law, that 'which is necessary to protect against imminent threat, imminent threat, to life or property,'" he said.

"And so our applying that standard is what resulted across the board in furloughing roughly 70 percent."

Asked about the high number of furloughs, Clapper said, "we do not consider any of our employees non-essential, but for the purposes of this law... that causes us to make very painful choices."

"From my standpoint, it is extremely damaging," he said.

Clapper, who was appearing at a Judiciary Committee hearing on US surveillance programs, said that "we will make adjustments depending on what we see as the potential imminent threats to life or property."

Verdict draft leaked to discredit trial

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He made the comment in the courtroom of ICT-1 minutes before proceedings in a war crimes case commenced against Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Motiur Rahman Nizami in the morning.

The three-member ICT-1 on Tuesday awarded the death penalty to BNP lawmaker Salauddin Quader Chowdhury for committing crimes against humanity and genocide during the 1971 Liberation War.

Immediately after the pronouncement of the verdict, the convict's family members and defence lawyers told the media that the verdict was available on different websites before the tribunal delivered the judgment.

They claimed "the copy of the verdict" was in a computer at the law ministry.

Nasiruddin said that according to the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973, the tribunal must provide both prosecution and defence with certified copies of the judgment on the day of the verdict. And therefore the tribunal does not fix a date for pronouncing the judgment until it is prepared.

"On the day of the verdict, the tribunal members finalise the portion involving the sentences upon reaching a consensus," he said.

Nasiruddin said defence lawyers are also officers of the tribunal. "It was the defence counsels' duty to bring the matter to the tribunal's notice before the verdict's pronouncement. Instead of doing that, they later showed the draft copy to the media and termed the judgment a dictated verdict," he said.

"It appears that there is a similarity between the leaked verdict and the draft. But the leaked verdict doesn't have any similarity with the final verdict," said the ICT registrar.

"It can be inferred that the said draft verdict was leaked after it was composed at the tribunal." And it was leaked by an organised vested group and the beneficiaries of the misdeed, he said.

The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the GD that the tribunal filed with Shahbagh Police Station.

"There is no scope for publishing the verdict or any part of it before it is pronounced. It is a matter of great concern how parts of the said draft verdict were leaked from the tribunal and published on the internet."

"It is also a threat to the safety and transparency of

the tribunal," read the GD. The tribunal asked the law enforcers to take legal action after carrying out an investigation.

"IT'S A CONSPIRACY" Speaking in the ICT-1 courtroom, Justice Selim said, "The conspiracy [the leak of the verdict's draft copy] was aimed at making the tribunal controversial."

He expressed surprise at the claims that the judgment had been drafted at the law ministry and "the leaked draft of the verdict" was exactly the same as the judgment that was read out at the tribunal.

"Those who are trying to make the verdict controversial are making comments without going through the full verdict."

"The choice of words and language [of the verdict and the leaked version] are totally different."

"How can law ministry

officials, who hold the rank of district judges, dictate to us, judges of the High Court?"

"Are they more competent than us that we should need them to write the verdict?" he asked. "Sad... it is really very sad," he said.

Justice Selim was also unhappy about the defence lawyers' claim that the tribunal did not allow Justice Shamim Hasnain to give a deposition in favour of Salauddin.

Referring to a previous order by ICT-1, he said, "Honourable Justice Shamim Hasnain is a sitting judge of the Supreme Court. How could we summon him without his consent for giving deposition [for Salauddin]?"

"He did not give his consent. If he had, we would have allowed him to testify," said Justice Selim.

The ICT registrar said

Justice Hasnain had never informed the tribunal whether he was willing to testify in the case.

On July 23, Fakhru Islam, defence counsel for Salauddin, had filed two petitions with ICT-1 for adjourning the case proceedings till July 28, and accepting as defence document an affidavit of Justice Hasnain's mother.

Rejecting the defence lawyers' prayer, the tribunal said the affidavit was not acceptable, as Justice Hasnain, not his mother, was on the list of defence witnesses.

On the adjournment of the petition, the tribunal said the defence had promised to produce businessman Salman F Rahman and Justice Hasnain as witnesses but had failed to do so.

It, however, adjourned the case proceedings until July 24 "for the sake of justice".

SQ Chowdhury

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Acting secretary general of the BNP Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir came up with the party's formal reaction a day after the International Crimes Tribunal-1 sentenced SQ Chowdhury to death for committing crimes against humanity and genocide during the Liberation War in 1971.

Fakhru read out a statement at a press briefing at his party's Naya Paltan central office. The tribunal's judgment lost its acceptability to people as "the verdict was leaked out before it was delivered," he said.

Citing internet sources, Fakhru said the law ministry started writing the verdict on May 23 this year when the tribunal was recording the depositions. "It is an

unprecedented incident in the history of trials in the world and is contrary to justice."

The BNP spokesperson went on, "We are surprised that the International Crimes Tribunal gave death penalty to BNP standing committee member and parliament member Salauddin Quader Chowdhury."

Fakhru did not reply to any of a volley of questions from journalists at the 14-minute briefing.

"No question, no question," he said while leaving the venue, flanked by the party's standing committee members Moudud Ahmed, MK Anwar and Rafiqul Islam Mia, among others.

Journalists were also not given copies of the state-

ment despite repeated requests from them.

Fakhru also alleged that the government did not allow two defence witnesses, who are well-established in the society and one of them is a Supreme Court judge, to appear before the tribunal.

He said a defence witness and many others said through affidavits that SQ Chowdhury left Bangladesh on March 29, 1971 and stayed in Pakistan until October of the same year.

"But the tribunal didn't take into consideration that all the nine charges for which he [SQ Chowdhury] was given death sentence and jail terms concerned crimes committed in between April 13 and July, 1971," he added.

Meanwhile, Election Commissioner Zabeed Ali yesterday said SQ Chowdhury's membership of parliament will continue until final disposal of the cases.

Talking to journalists at his office, Zabeed also said parliament will take the decision regarding cancellation of his membership.

SCBA DEMANDS PROBE

The Supreme Court Bar Association, dominated by pro-BNP-Jamaat lawyers, has demanded formation of a probe body headed by a former chief justice to investigate the alleged leak of the war crimes tribunal's verdict.

It made the demand at an emergency general meeting yesterday.

BNP's Mahbub under fire

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Chulam Arieff Tipoo drew its attention to the remarks made by Mahbub in response to the judgement.

Prosecutor Zead Al Malum placed several newspaper reports before the court and the judges went through them.

"What he [Mahbub] said before the media is unexpected and unwarranted," said Tipoo, seeking legal action against Mahbub.

The tribunal then asked the prosecution to file an appeal in this regard.

Prosecutor Tureen Afroz told The Daily Star in the evening that the prosecution were preparing to file a contempt of court petition against Mahbub. They are expected to file the petition today.

Meanwhile, eminent

rights activist Sultana Kamal said trial and punishment of the war criminals had long been a national aspiration.

"The people, who are holding out such threats, have taken a stance against the national interest and the nation."

These people have exposed their character by giving such threats, said Sultana Kamal, who had testified as a prosecution witness in the war crimes case against former Jamaat ameer Ghulam Azam.

"We are very much concerned about the fate of the country if these people come to power," added Sultana Kamal, also a former advisor to a caretaker government.

"I can't believe that a lawyer can make such a comment," eminent jurist

M Amir-Ul Islam said.

Shahriar Kabir, executive president of Ekattorer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee that has been campaigning for war crimes trial since 1992, said, "His [Mahbub] comment is nothing but treason and contempt of court. He should be brought to book."

By making such comments, Mahbub had instigated BNP cadres against the judges, witnesses and other people involved with the trial, said Shahriar, who was the first prosecution witness in the case against convicted war criminal Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed.

"We are also very much concerned about the security of the judges," he noted.

Meanwhile, State Minister for Law Quamrul Islam said Mahbub's com-

ment was tantamount to contempt of court and an "implicit threat" to the judges and lawyers.

In a press briefing at the secretariat, Quamrul, himself a lawyer, said Mahbub's comments went against the ethics of the legal profession and asked him to withdraw them.

Mahbub was one of the public prosecutors at the Special Tribunal that in the early 1970s conducted the trial of collaborators of the Pakistan army under the Bangladesh Collaborators (Special Tribunal) Order, 1972.

Forty years later, he became a lawyer for war criminals Jamaat-e-Islami leaders Delwar Hossain Sayedee and Abdul Quader Mollah.

DCs to have no role

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the poll for Grameen Bank directors in three phases.

The election commission would be comprised of representatives from Bangladesh Bank, a scheduled bank and Grameen Bank. The central bank will ensure the election in all three phases.

The two-member government committee of Shah Alam Sarwar, managing director of IFIC Bank, and Murad Reza, additional attorney general, had suggested conducting the election in two phases.

The two-tier electoral process would not be viable, said the Banking Division official.

The new rules have been drafted in line with the existing rules enacted in 1987. The finance ministry, however, has brought in a number of changes to it.

Under the existing rules, the Grameen Bank board appoints the one-member election commission. The board picks an official of the bank as the election commissioner for conducting the election.

The proposed rules also said the election commissioner would appoint an official of Grameen Bank as the returning officer instead of DCs.

The provision for appointment of DCs to conduct the election drew criticism from nine elected incumbent directors and employees of the microlender.

Although Finance Minister AMA Muhith publicly claimed that there were no rules for electing the directors of Grameen Bank, the government had formulated electoral rules on August 25, 1987, under which elections are held now.

Meanwhile, the Grameen Bank Act, 2013 will be placed at the cabinet today for approval, although the Grameen Bank Commission is yet to submit its final report to the government.

Formed in May last year to review the microlender's governing structure and its relations to the independent associated companies

founded by Prof Muhammad Yunus, the commission was due to submit its report on July 20.

If ratified by parliament, the new law will replace Grameen Bank Ordinance, 1983, and put the microcredit organisation under the direct control of Bangladesh Bank.

Although the Banking Companies Act does not apply to Ansar VDP Bank, Karmasangsthan Bank and Probashi Kalyan Bank, the government is formulating new laws to bring the Grameen Bank under the Banking Companies Act.

While giving its opinion about the proposed Palli Sanchay Bank, the central bank said although these three banks were set up to serve special purposes, they have not been able to live up to the expectations.

Founded in 1983, the Grameen Bank has been run successfully and efficiently, said an expert. Winner of Nobel Peace Prize in 2006, its model has already been replicated in many countries.

Obama cuts Asia trip

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the course of the week," National Security Council spokeswoman Caitlin Haydensaid.

Obama was originally due to leave the United States on Saturday and return a week later.

Not only must the president deal with the budget impasse and its effects, but he faces an even bigger crunch in Congress, which will put the United States at risk of defaulting on its debts if it does not raise the US public debt ceiling. Treasury Secretary Jack Lew has said the United States will exhaust its borrowing authority no later than October 17.

The fight between Obama's Democrats and the Republicans over the government's borrowing power is rapidly merging with the standoff over every day funding, which has forced the first government shutdown in 17 years and forced hundreds of thousands of federal employees to take unpaid leave.

The White House announcements about the Asia trip followed a fruitless day on Capitol Hill, with

congressional Democrats and Republicans coming no closer to resolving their differences.

Obama accused Republicans of taking the government hostage to sabotage his signature healthcare law, the most ambitious US social program in five decades, passed three years ago.

Republicans in the House of Representatives view the Affordable Care Act as a dangerous extension of government power, and have coupled their efforts to undermine it with continued efforts to block government funding. The Democratic-controlled Senate has repeatedly rejected those efforts.

The standoff has raised new concerns about Congress's ability to perform its most basic duties and threatens to hamper a still fragile economic recovery.

"This is a mess. A royal screw-up," said Democratic Representative Louise Slaughter of New York.

As police cordoned off landmarks such as the Lincoln Memorial, and government agencies stopped functions ranging from cancer treatment to trade negotiations,

Republicans in the House sought to restore funding to national parks, veterans' care and the District of Columbia, the capital.

An effort to pass the three bills fell short on Tuesday evening, but Republicans plan to try again on Wednesday. They are likely to be defeated by the Democratic-controlled Senate.

"That's important - a park? How about the kids who need daycare?" said Democratic Representative Sander Levin of Michigan. "You have to let all the hostages go. Every single one of them."

The setback to the Asia trip, designed to reinforce US commitment to the region, is the first obvious international consequence of the troubles in Washington.

"They've shut down the government over an ideological crusade to deny affordable health insurance to millions of Americans," Obama said on Tuesday.

Republicans said Obama could not complain about the impact of the shutdown while refusing to negotiate.

"The White House position is unsustainably hypo-

critical," said Michael Steel, a spokesman for House Speaker John Boehner.

Republicans said their latest proposal would help elderly veterans who on Tuesday pushed past barricades at the National World War Two Memorial to get into the site.

"They're coming here because they want to visit their memorial, the World War Two memorial. But no, the Obama administration has put barricades around it," said Republican Representative Mike Simpson of Idaho.

All three bills won support from a majority of the House, but fell short of the two-thirds vote needed to pass under special rules that allow quick action. Republican leaders plan to bring up the bills for a regular vote on Wednesday. Obama said he would veto the bills if they reached his desk.

The veterans in question got in to the memorial with help from several Republican lawmakers. But they did not seem interested in taking sides.

"It's just like a bunch of little kids fighting over candy," said George Atkinson, an 82-

year-old veteran of the Korean War. "The whole group ought to be replaced, top man down."

The selective spending plan appeared to temporarily unite Republicans, heading off a split between Tea Party conservatives who pushed for the government funding confrontation and moderates who appear to be losing stomach for the fight.

Representative Peter King, a New York moderate, estimated that more than 100 of the chamber's 232 Republicans would back Obama's demand to restore all government funding without conditions. That would be enough to easily pass the House with the support of the chamber's 200 Democrats.

The shutdown closed landmarks including access to the Grand Canyon and pared the government's spy agencies by 70 percent. In Washington, the National Zoo shut off a popular "panda cam" that allowed visitors to view its newborn panda cub online. In Pennsylvania, white supremacists had to cancel a planned rally at Gettysburg National Military Park.