

# Muhith gives in

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said only this when reporters asked about his change of mind after the meeting at the NEC auditorium.

At the meeting, members of the parliamentary standing committees on the finance and the planning ministries, public accounts and public undertakings raised the three demands, saying these were their electoral pledges to the voters.

Major (retd) Rafiqul Islam, Bir Uttam, member of the parliamentary body on the planning ministry, said if special allocation is not given, the lawmakers in future will not be able to face their electorates.

In almost all the pre-budget meetings earlier, lawmakers made the same demands but the minister expressed reservations about these.

Disapproving Muhith's stance on the MPO issue, Muhammad Abdur Razzaque, chairman of the standing committee on the finance ministry, yesterday said many educational institutions may face closure if the government stops including schools in the MPO.

And the finance minister seemed to have reluctantly accepted the demand when he said, "In my view, the MPO system is not good. However, the grants given are necessary".

Muhith also said the system should be recast so that the grants given may benefit not only teachers but also their institutions.

Speaking about his changed position on building new roads, the minister said the LGED minister has convinced him and he understands that "construction of rural roads is necessary but not national highways".

Muhith also criticised the widespread corruption in the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) and suggested that lawmakers and upazila chairmen be involved with the LGED activities for the development works in their areas to check corruption.

At the meeting, Major (retd) Rafiqul suggested that the finance minister hold pre-budget meeting with the ultra poor section of the population so that the budget for the next fiscal year reflects their aspirations.

# BJP upbeat ahead

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in New Delhi tomorrow. There the party will draw up a plan to elect Modi at the earliest as the leader of the BJP parliamentary party comprised of the newly-elected members of the Lok Sabha.

The parliamentary board will decide what roles veterans like Lal Krishna Advani, who opposed Modi's appointment as prime ministerial candidate, and Murli Manohar Joshi, who was unwilling to shift from Varanasi parliamentary constituency where Modi eventually contested this year's polls, will play, Rajnath said.

Tomorrow's meeting will also set the date of the meeting of lawmakers from all constituent parties of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, apart from that of BJP parliamentary party meeting.

All exit polls forecast that the BJP-led NDA will win a majority in the 543-seat Lok Sabha.

Exit polls in India, however, have gone wrong in the past.

Modi, who single-handedly led the BJP's election campaign mainly on the plank of development, governance, investment and jobs, is expected to become India's 14th prime minister after the official results are declared today.

The vote counting is likely to be completed by 5:00pm (Indian time), the Election Commission said.

By noon, a final picture will emerge on who are going to be the major players in the 16th Lok Sabha. Before the meeting in

Gandhinagar, Rajnath Singh, Gadkari and another senior party figure Sushma Swaraj held separate meetings in Delhi.

According to media reports, Swaraj, the leader of the opposition, might be the new foreign or defence minister while Jaitley could get the finance portfolio.

Swaraj had reportedly voiced reservations about Modi as the BJP's prime ministerial candidate, and did not play a major role in the election campaign and limited herself to the electoral battle in her own constituency in Vidisha in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh.

Advani, a former deputy PM under Atal Bihari Vajpayee, has already indicated that he will not join a Modi-led government and may be elevated to the position of NDA chairman, which earlier was held by Vajpayee. Advani is currently working chairman of the NDA.

Media reports predict that Advani and Joshi may also be considered for the parliament Speaker post.

The NDA is projected to get 279 seats in the Lok Sabha elections, crossing the required majority mark for the 543-member House. The BJP alone is likely to bag the highest-ever tally of 235 seats, according to NDTV-Hansa exit polls aired on Wednesday night.

The exit poll results showed that the ruling United Progressive Alliance would get 103 seats, with the Congress projected to get only 79, its all-time low.



**Police confiscate belongings of Nur Hossain, the prime accused in the seven-murder case, from his house at Shimrail of Narayanganj yesterday in line with a court order.**

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

# Govt stance exposes reason for inaction

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Meanwhile, Independent TV last night reported that the defence ministry had responded to the home ministry letter about the arrest of the trio, saying there was no legal bar in arresting them.

Shawkat Mostafa, additional home secretary, told the private television channel that the defence ministry letter was forwarded to the inspector general of police for his action.

The three controversial Rab men are Lt Col Tareque Sayeed Mohammad, Maj Arif Hossain and Lt Commander SM Masud Rana. They were forced to retire on May 6 for their reported links to the abductions and killings.

None of them is accused in the case filed by Selina Islam, widow of one of the victims Nazrul Islam, but the HC on May 11 ordered the inspector general of police to nab them as suspects.

The court order came after Nazrul's family alleged that Rab men had committed the crime in exchange for Tk 6 crore from Nur Hossain, the prime accused, and other suspects.

Following the court order, State Minister for Home Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal has, almost every day, told the media that the trio would be arrested in line with the HC directive.

Yesterday, he told journalists at the secretariat that the Rab men would be detained in a day or two.

At the ALCWC meeting, the PM said the trio were inside Dhaka cantonment and police would have to follow army rules to arrest them, sources said.

As if echoing Hasina, Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday said the three Rab men were not named in the case.

If the investigation officer thinks he has some evidence against them, he can "apply" for arresting them as per law, he told the BBC Bangla Service.

Meanwhile, the HC yesterday directed

the government to submit further progress reports on the probe before it on June 4.

The court also directed the government to create a congenial environment in the area so that witnesses can place depositions before the probe committees without fear.

The HC issued the order after seeing the report of the Criminal Investigation Department of police, which said some people were frightened.

Also yesterday, the government committee inquiring into the murders held its second public hearing at Narayanganj Circuit House and recorded the depositions of 57 people.

The committee will hold its next hearing tomorrow. It will be held at Siddhirganj, as people said they were afraid to give depositions at the Circuit House as Hossain and his associates had not been arrested yet.

In another development, police seized a revolver and some bullets from Hossain's Siddhirganj house yesterday.

They also seized two rare macaw birds, seven televisions, two refrigerators, three almirahs, two sofas and other furniture.

## PUBLIC HEARING

After the hearing that began around 10:00am, Ripon, brother of victim Swapan, said, "Please kill us all. Then we'll not seek justice. This is what I told the probe committee."

Asked why he had said so, he said they were apprehensive about getting justice as progress in the case was not satisfactory.

Iman Ali, a resident of Siddhirganj, said after giving his deposition, "We want justice, nothing else. We want trial of Nur Hossain and the Rab officials involved."

Shahidul Islam, father-in-law of

Nazrul Islam, also gave deposition.

He told reporters that he was receiving threats for speaking up against Rab.

Asked if the three Rab members would be interrogated, committee chief Shahjahan Ali Mollah said they would do everything needed to be done.

## HC PROCEEDINGS

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam presented seven progress reports from different agencies before the HC bench of Justice Md Rezaul Haque and Justice Gobinda Chandra Tagore.

The government agencies said in the reports that they had made some progress in inquiry into the seven-murder case, as they arrested some people as suspects and have seized some evidence.

On April 27, Narayanganj panel mayor Nazrul Islam and his four aides and senior lawyer Chandan Sarker and his driver were kidnapped from the Dhaka-Narayanganj link road around the same time in broad daylight.

Six bodies, including those of Nazrul and Chandan, were found floating in the Shitalakkhya river on April 30, and another was found the following day. The other victims are Moniruzzaman Swapan, Tajul Islam, Liton, Jahangir and Ibrahim.

The seven-member committee, the home, law and public administration ministries, the inspector general of police, the Rab and the Criminal Investigation Department sent their reports to the attorney general's office to place them before the HC.

The IGP in his report said law enforcers were raiding different places to arrest the culprits.

The Rab report says the force is probing the alleged involvement of some of its members in the crime.

[Our Narayanganj correspondent contributed to this report]

# Ershad

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out to them.

On April 24, the same court concluded the recording of statements of the 12 witnesses in the much-talked-about radar purchase graft case.

Abdus Sattar Sarkar, deputy director of the Anti-Corruption Commission and also investigation officer of the case, pressed charges against Ershad and four others on October 27, 1994.

Of them, AKM Musa, a director of United Traders Ltd, has been absconding since the case was filed.

The government later withdrew charges against another accused Shahazad Ali, a director of United Traders Ltd.

The court framed charges against Ershad, Sultan, Mantazuddin and Musa on August 12, 1995.

The High Court cleared the way for trial of the case on August 8, 2006 after proceedings had been stayed for a long time. The trial resumed on November 2, 2010.

The now-defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption lodged the case against Ershad and four others with Cantonment police on May 4, 1992.

According to the prosecution, Ershad in collusion with others had allegedly caused a loss of Tk 64.04 crore to the state exchequer by purchasing radars from the US instead of France for the air force while he was in power.

Ershad was accused in 21 cases, including several graft cases, after he was ousted from power in 1990.

He has so far been acquitted of and discharged from 18 cases as the prosecution failed to prove the charges brought against him.

Three other cases, including the one for murder of Maj Gen Abul Manzur, are still pending with the court.

# Expat workers

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will help our workers to choose better jobs and earn handsome salaries," Shafikul Azim, labour counsellor at the embassy, told The Daily Star over phone yesterday.

He said tens of thousands of Bangladeshi workers would benefit from these reforms. He, however, added that the Qatari government needed to take some steps to increase Bangladeshi migrants' salaries as expatriates' income in Qatar is still the lowest amongst the six Gulf States.

"We have placed some recommendations – a minimum of QR1,500, fixed working hours, work safety and living conditions, etc," the diplomat said.

Around one lakh Bangladeshis currently work in various sectors in Qatar.

The Qatar authorities have also announced an end to the controversial sponsorship system for foreign workers.

"The relationship will be redefined as between employee and employer instead of worker and sponsor," the statement added.

Sponsorship systems for foreign workers exist in most Gulf countries, which employ millions of foreigners from Asian countries. The system has been strongly criticised by human rights groups.

Passport confiscation, a widely used practice in the Gulf, will continue to be banned, with fines on employers, who are found to confiscate passports, increased from Qatari Riyal (QR) 10,000 to QR50,000.

These reforms will also end the long-standing requirement that foreign workers have to obtain their employers' consent before leaving the country.

This will now be replaced with an automated system through the ministry of interior, the statement said.

# When doctors turn hooligans

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good either in the country or abroad. One will certainly not condone the behaviour of citizens who round on doctors every time a family member dies in hospital.

Anyone who takes the law in his hands needs severe disciplining. But the fact is also true that very large numbers of doctors in Bangladesh adopt a laid-back attitude to dealing with patients in their care when urgent treatment or check-up is of the essence. There are incessant reports of doctors spending long hours treating patients in their private chambers before deigning to put in an appearance at the hospitals where they are employed and where other patients, with their families, have been waiting for them for hours together.

To this state of indifference has now been added the spectacle of doctors and interns resorting to unabashed hooliganism on any ground whatsoever. When interns pick a quarrel with individuals on the question of who can use what elevator in a hospital (and this happened at Dhaka Medical College Hospital), one has little doubt that somewhere the idea of the Hippocratic oath has gone haywire. When at Rajshahi Medical College, doctors refuse to attend to an ailing journalist because he is part of a profession which happens to be focusing on misdemeanours at hospitals, one can only be appalled. The RMCH incident drew a swift High Court response. Should those who committed the crime not be dealt with sternly therefore?

In any other modern, assertive and secure state, medical practitioners violating their code of conduct and indulging in mayhem would not only be shown the door but swiftly made to answer for their misconduct. In Bangladesh over these past few weeks especially, angry doctors have shut the gates of their institutions, including their emergency departments, caring not a bit about the ill and the wounded begging to be treated, to be let in. The elderly have waited for hours for doctors to show pity, in vain. A man has tried to have his brother, the latter with severe injuries on his body, treated urgently. His entreaties collapsed before the cruelty of striking doctors and interns.

This growing culture of violence perpetrated by doctors and interns, as

manifested in sudden shutdowns at hospitals to the detriment of the physically ailing, calls for stern action. And action is needed elsewhere as well. There are yet a number of doctors who refuse to be transferred out of Dhaka. That simply will not do. And there may well be others who, like Shafikul Azam, are serving at more than one institution. Such doctors need to be brought within the purview of the law. Shafikul and others like him must be investigated in the full glare of transparency.

The health of citizens will not be safe in their hands unless exemplary action is taken against all doctors and all interns, besides others, who in recent weeks through their strikes, shutdowns and hooliganism, have made a mockery of the medical profession.

# Only small structures

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sand in the river by one Major Alam and a 16000-square foot reinforced concrete wall on an area of around 36 decimals by East West University near the Dhour Bridge.

But they had to give up halfway as they lacked adequate equipment and labourers.

"We've to discuss with technical experts how to remove such a huge reinforced concrete structure and pile of sand as we can't mobilise powerful tugboat there due to half a dozen low-height bridges built over the Turag by different government authorities," said BIWTA Joint Director Saiful Islam.

Mohammad Abdus Salam, executive magistrate of Gazipur, on Wednesday said they would auction the sand used for filling up the river yesterday.

But yesterday he said they were busy with the eviction drive in Tongi and would deal with the removal of massive encroachments some other day.

The joint authorities took five years to undertake a second eviction drive at the Turag since the last one was carried out in 2009.

Two other massive encroachments near the Dhour Bridge -- Lamichha Spinning Mills and Cambrian College --

have been excluded by the BIWTA from its eviction drive. The Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk) on March 10 demolished part of the spinning mills for destroying the conservable flood flow zone.

Asked about sparing the two commercial buildings at Tongi kitchen market from the eviction drive, Harun-Or-Rashid, executive engineer of BIWTA, said those structures have been kept as one of those is a madrasa.

When this correspondent told Harun that the buildings house about 100 commercial shops and rooms for the imam and muezzin of Tongi Bazar Mosque, the BIWTA official said he heard that it was a madrasa.

On the priority to build a walkway at a time when the faulty pillars are under review by a joint secretary-led committee, BIWTA Chairman Md Samsuddoha Khandaker said, "Pillars have been set up correctly at the Tongi kitchen market point of the river."

About the removal of massive sand-filling and knocking down the two commercial buildings run in the name of Tongi Bazar Mosque, he said he was not aware of these issues and he would make any decision in this regard only after visiting the site.

# Hospital staff held

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head of the private medical college, has been working there fulltime despite being a government employee. The physician and the arrestee then held the journalist captive to a room at the hospital in the capital's Dhanmondi for more than two hours and beat him up, according to the first information report filed with Hazeribagh Police Station.

Sufian was arrested in Gulshan, said Officer-in-Charge of the police station Mainul Islam. The main accused, Shafikul, however, is on the run, he added.

The college authorities on Wednesday suspended Shafikul, and began a probe into the matter after Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council (BMDC) had served a show cause notice to the college.

Meanwhile, BMDC and the health ministry formed two committees to look into the allegations against Shafikul.

There are complaints that Shafikul has been using two designations -- assistant professor of Chittagong Medical College Hospital and professor of ZH Sikder Women's Medical College and Hospital -- on the name-

plate at his private chamber in Chittagong.

"We shall look into all these issues," said Professor Abu Shafi Ahmed Amin, president of BMDC. The five-member committee led by former BMDC member Professor Rashid-E-Mahbub will hold its first meeting tomorrow.

The committee is supposed to submit a report in a few days, and actions will be taken promptly based on that report, Abu Shafi told The Daily Star.

Other members of the committee are Prof Ismail Khan, dean of the medicine department, Dhaka University; Jamaluddin Chowdhury, secretary general of Bangladesh Private Medical Practitioners Association; Murad Reza, additional attorney general, and Arman Hossain, a deputy registrar of BMDC.

The committee formed by the health and family welfare ministry is comprised of Joint Secretary Iftekhar Uddin and Deputy Secretary Humayun Kabir, said Mosharraf Hossain, joint secretary of the ministry.

"The committee will probe into the whole affairs regarding the attack on Shishir Morol and the allegations

# Save Buriganga

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engine-driven boats from plying the river as they leak diesel and other oils and contaminate its water. "Only manually-driven boats can ply the river."

Listing her government's various steps to extract wastage from the Buriganga, she said river-dredging projects were taken up to restore navigability in many rivers, including the Balu, Turag, Jamuna and Dhaleshwari.

Such dredging also helped the rivers enhance their water retention capacity during the monsoon, she added.

Hasina also said steps had been taken to set up an ETP at the city's Hatirjheel as well as connecting it with Gulshan and Banani lakes.

She observed that the filling up of canals such as those in Purana Paltan and Segunbagicha had damaged the city's drainage system.

The premier stressed the need for protecting the country's environment, keeping in mind issues related to food and security for its 16 crore people.

"Our soil is fertile... we'll have to protect our soil and environment... then all plans should be undertaken to ensure their [people's] food, security and a healthy environment for living," she said.

About the apprehension that a part of the country will be submerged due to a rise in sea level, she said her government had taken steps to dredge the rivers and enhance their water retention capacity.

The country's river routes have remained neglected for long, though they are the cheapest means for transportation of passengers and goods.

To further activate the river routes, Hasina suggested taking joint initiatives by the ministries of environment and forests, water resources and shipping.

She said coastal forests have been created through afforestation on some 1.96 lakh hectares of char lands while some 1,200 square kilometres of coastal land had been added to the main land through coastal afforestation.

Environment and Forests Minister Anwar Hossain Monju, Deputy Minister Abdullah Al Islam Jakob and Secretary Shafiqur Rahman Patwari, among others, were present.