

16th amendment

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According to the provision, the Supreme Judicial Council, led by the chief justice, would enquire into the capacity or conduct of a judge and make a recommendation to the president, and then the president could order on the judge's removal.

Yesterday, the lawyer prayed to the court to issue a rule upon the government to explain why the 16th amendment to the constitution should not be declared illegal and unconstitutional.

The HC is likely to hear the petition on October 19, Eunus told The Daily Star.

On September 17, parliament passed the 16th constitutional amendment bill, rejecting all calls for soliciting public opinion, and a gazette notification was issued in this regard on September 22.

42 judges

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lodged with the ministry in this regard. The ministry then engages a senior district judge to probe the allegation.

The final probe report is sent to the HC for a decision which is later executed by the ministry, mentioned the officials.

The ministry in last two months has sent three lower court judges into forced retirement for misconduct and corruption. The judges are AKM Ishtiaque Hossain, chairman of First Labour Court of Chittagong and former District and Sessions Judge of Dhaka; Mizanur Rahman, Additional District Judge of Jessor; and Salauddin Md Akram, Joint District Judge of Lalmorirhat.

Ministry sources said Ishtiaque as the district judge in Khulna had acquitted the accused in a few hundred corruption cases without taking the charges into cognisance.

There were allegations of taking bribes and other corruption against Mizanur while Salauddin had been absent from office for a long time.

Opportunities

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Addressing the event, Social Welfare Minister Syed Mohsin Ali announced that white canes, which are necessary for safe movement of visually impaired people, will be produced in the country from next year.

Presently, equipment like white canes and wheelchairs are not produced in the country.

The minister also pledged to introduce special mobile services to provide physiotherapy to physically challenged people at their doorsteps.

Saidul Haque, president of Jatiya Protibondhi Forum, demanded a reserved seat in the parliament for people with disabilities.

Promod Mankin, state minister for the social welfare ministry, among others, spoke.

Mortified

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Islam, officer-in-charge of Mohaddevpur Police Station.

Returning home, she took poison in her room around 12:30pm.

Her family first took her to Mohaddevpur Upazila Health Complex and later to Naogaon Sadar Hospital. As her condition did not improve, she was being shifted to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital when she died around 5:00am yesterday.

Rocky of Bindarampur village in Mohaddevpur upazila went into hiding following the incident.

The girl's father filed a case against the boy with Mohaddevpur Police Station yesterday.

The Daily Star has kept from identifying the girl and her family, given the social stigma associated with the incident.

Stem cell trial

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one clinical trial was to test the safety and tolerability of the operation, which involved injections with three different doses - 50,000, 100,000 and 150,000 cells - said Robert Lanza, chief scientific officer of Advanced Cell Technology in Marlborough, Massachusetts.

No adverse safety issues were found during the three years that the 18 patients were monitored. There was also evidence that the injected cells had survived, and had contributed to an improvement in the eyesight of some patients, Dr Lanza said.

"About half of the patients had an improvement in visual acuity of three lines or more, which corresponds to a doubling of the visual angle, and is generally accepted as clinically significant," Dr Lanza said.

Follow-up testing found that 10 out of the 18 patients experienced substantial improvements in how well they could see, according to the study published in the journal *The Lancet*.

Further clinical trials will be carried out to test the efficacy of the treatment.

No sign yet of MH370 in first update of underwater search

AFP, Sydney

Australian authorities released their first update on the latest underwater probe for missing flight MH370 yesterday, saying more than 670 square kilometres had been searched without success.

The Malaysia Airlines aircraft carrying 239 people vanished en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing on March 8 and no sign of the jet has been found despite a massive air and sea search.

The Boeing 777, which is believed to have crashed into the southern Indian Ocean after inexplicably veering off course, is now the subject of a renewed underwater hunt far off western Australia.

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB), which is leading the search, said the Malaysian-contracted vessel GO Phoenix was continuing to conduct underwater search operations.

The underwater search began on October 6 and followed a survey to map the seabed. About 127,000 square kilometres of the search zone has been mapped so far.

Sophisticated vehicles attached to the ship by tow cables have been programmed to detect the biggest parts of the aircraft likely to be in one piece, such as engines and fuselage.

"GO Phoenix continues to conduct underwater search operations," the ATSB said.

"At one point, operations were halted in order to recover the deep tow vehicle and rectify a cable connection fault. Operations were quickly recommenced."

GO Phoenix is searching the area considered the most likely final resting place of the plane, based on detailed analysis of the aircraft's satellite communications.

A second ship, the Fugro Discovery, is conducting sea trials and is expected to join the search mid next week in the second most likely area, officials have said.

Australia has been spearheading the hunt for the plane, a dauntingly vast task that has been beset by false leads and initial confusion -- to the continued frustration of grieving relatives.

Ex-Libyan general in bid to retake Benghazi

AFP, Benghazi

Forces loyal to a prominent former general in Libya launched a new bid yesterday to recapture the second city Benghazi from Islamist fighters vying for power in the violence-plagued state.

The North African nation has been gripped by turmoil since the 2011 uprising that toppled long-time leader Moamer Kadhafi, with the authorities struggling to control powerful militias that ousted and killed him.

Gunfire and explosions were heard in Benghazi yesterday, according to an AFP correspondent, after ex-general Khalifa Haftar announced that he was ready to "liberate" the flashpoint eastern city from Islamists.

Witnesses said that tanks had launched an assault against an Islamist militia known as the "February 17 Martyrs Brigade", while planes carried out air raids against the group, whose headquarters is located west of the city.

Oil-rich Libya has two competing governments and a host of rival armed militias jostling for influence in the largely lawless country.

One parliament, elected in June, is recognised by the international community but contested by the militia controlling most of Tripoli and by the Islamists who dominate Benghazi.

Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thani and the majority faction in the elected legislature have decamped to the far eastern city of Tobruk because of widespread insecurity, including in the capital, where a rival administration has been set up.

Haftar, 71, who took part in the uprising against Kadhafi, launched a military offensive dubbed "Operation Dignity" against Islamists in Benghazi in May, but with little success.

In a speech broadcast late Tuesday, Haftar warned: "The coming hours and days will be difficult".

He said: "I bring you today (a message) from the men of Operation Dignity saying that they are ready to fulfil their next goal, which is to liberate the city of Benghazi."

The former general has been vague about his ultimate goal and critics have accused him of seeking to mount a coup.

US experts inspect

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African countries since August 12. Of them, 97 have completed the 21-day follow-up and are in good health.

The US team's visit comes a week after six Bangladeshis returning from Liberia managed to pass through the airport without being screened.

Rezia said five of them were screened later, and the authorities were still trying to locate the person who was yet to be screened.

Prof Mahmudur Rahman, member of inter-ministerial monitoring committee on Ebola, claimed that the health screening arrangement at the international airport is one of the best in the world.

"This is because the airlines inform the immigration whenever somebody buys a ticket from West African countries. The immigration then communicates it to the medical team at the airport," said Mahmudur, also director at the Institute of Epidemiology,

Disease Control and Research.

On the passenger's arrival, the medical team inquires after him, checks his temperature and collects his contact numbers for follow-up, he said.

The World Health Organisation termed the Ebola outbreak in West African nations an international health emergency. The deadly disease has claimed at least 4,447 lives, mostly in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Nigeria.

Medical teams have been assigned to conduct screening for Ebola at 25 international, sea and land ports in Bangladesh.

Coordination among airlines, immigration and medical teams has been strengthened after six Bangladeshi expatriates from Liberia were allowed to leave the airport without health screening on October 9, said Mahmudur.

Arrest order for Latif

Latif, now in India's Kolkata, is facing more than two-dozen cases filed with different courts in several parts of the country over the comments.

He was removed from the cabinet as well as the Awami League presidium on Sunday.

As per the Code of Criminal Procedure, no lawyer can be assigned to defend any accused at the court in his or her absence in such cases.

Latif's return to the country is uncertain for now, sources said.

"He should be barred from entering the country at this moment," a senior official of a law enforcement agency told The Daily Star yesterday.

Law enforcement agencies have been kept on alert to detain him if he returns, he added.

Latif is under fire for the derogatory comments he made on hajj and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in New York on September 28.

SHOW-CAUSE NOTICE RECEIVED

A show-cause notice served by the Awami League was received by the caretaker of Latif's residence at Kalihati yesterday, reports our Tangail correspondent.

On Tuesday, the AL issued the notice to Latif asking him to explain in seven days why he would not be expelled from the party following his comments demeaning hajj and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

His primary membership in the party has also been suspended.

Latif arrived in India on Sunday and is now in Kolkata.

At home, he faces about 30 cases for hurting religious sentiments.

Militant held

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The policemen then retaliated by opening fire on them. Rubel sustained bullet injuries to his left hand while his accomplices fled the scene, the OC added.

Aminul Islam, a businessman who was passing by on a motorcycle at the time, was also hit by a bullet in his right hand.

Both were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. The police recovered a pistol, two bullets and two syringes filled with poisonous liquid from the scene.

During an interrogation, the arrested said he and his associates had planned to kill a college teacher by poisoning him, said Lutful Kabir, deputy commissioner of Gulshan Division of Dhaka Metropolitan Police. They carried firearms to ensure a safe escape.

An assistant commissioner of the division said the trio wanted to kill the teacher because of what Rubel said was that the teacher had allegedly forced one of his male colleagues to shave his beard, a female teacher to attend classes without veil and turned a prayer place into a classroom.

The police are yet to confirm the militant group the three belong to.

Some religious books and a bottle filled with poison were recovered during a raid on a mess at Abdullahpur, carried out on the basis of information from Rubel, police sources said.

A case was filed under the anti-terrorism act with Cantonment Police Station against four people, including the arrested.

The Detective Branch (DB) of police will investigate the case, according to the police station. The DB took Rubel into its custody yesterday afternoon and interrogated him at its Mintoo Road office.

The two countries agreed to open a yuan-ruble swap line worth 150 billion yuan (\$24.5 billion) to reduce dependence on the US dollar and promote bilateral trade and investment.

"We are witnessing a growing tendency of the development of our cooperation in all spheres," Li said.

Li and Putin spoke after Russian and Chinese officials on Monday signed dozens of deals ranging from energy to banking to cars.

The two countries agreed to open a yuan-ruble swap line worth 150 billion yuan (\$24.5 billion) to reduce dependence on the US dollar and promote bilateral trade and investment.

"A large amount of agreements have been signed," Putin said in remarks released by the Kremlin.

"But it's not the quantity that matters. What's important is that they are promoting our real cooperation, and in very different fields, both in energy and hi-tech, which is especially important."

Moscow and Beijing 'natural allies'

Putin tells China

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday praised growing economic ties with "natural ally" Beijing as he hosted Chinese premier Li Keqiang for high-profile talks.

Critics, however, claimed that in his bid to spite the West, Putin signed an agreement that was more beneficial to China than to Russia.

Ahead of Li's visit to Russia, the two countries got caught up in a diplomatic incident of sorts when an endangered Siberian tiger wandered over the border into China in search of a meal.

The big cat, named Kuzya, was among three Siberian tigers released into the wild by the Russian president in May.

Kuzya's arrival sparked fears that the rare animal could fall victim to Chinese poachers.

The foreign ministry in Beijing pledged that Putin's tiger would be protected, citing an existing agreement on cross-border protection of Siberian tigers.

"We will make joint efforts with the Russian side to protect wild Siberian tigers which travel back and forth between China and Russia," foreign ministry spokesman Hong Lei said in a statement.

Once bitter foes during the Cold War, Moscow and Beijing have over the past years ramped up cooperation, driven by a desire to counter-balance US global dominance.

China has spoken out against Western sanctions against Russia and has called on all sides to reach a political settlement over Ukraine.

Ahead of his Moscow visit, Li travelled to Germany for talks with Chancellor Angela Merkel. He will also participate in a Europe-Asia summit in Milan later this week.

Birth rate drops

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"I think the stabilisation [equal birth and death rate] would occur after the population reaches 18 to 18.5 crore," the population expert said.

Citing BDHS-2011 data, Rob said total fertility rates in Chittagong and Sylhet divisions were 2.8 and 3.1 per woman respectively but were close to 2.1 in other divisions.

"Birth rate is expected to come close to 2 in Chittagong and Sylhet by now," he told The Daily Star.

The change in behavioural pattern among urban slum population, as found in BUHS-2013, is noteworthy.

The sources said they got some of the money trail on the basis of which action was being taken by the agency.

The CBI sources further said the probe met a stumbling block because the account books of the group have been "purposefully" removed from the offices of Saradha on the excuse of the mob attack on its offices after news of scam broke out.

Also, this might send a signal to religious parties and organisations that the government is supporting Latif.

The latest development comes amid reports that the government does not want Latif, who sparked controversy by making derogatory comments on hajj and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), to return to the country, at least for now.

Against this backdrop, Latif told The Daily Star on Sunday that he wanted to return to the country but if he cannot, he would stay in India.

But the source said Dhaka verbally requested New Delhi not to permit Latif to stay in India. Such a message was communicated with the Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka and also the Bangladesh High Commission in Delhi.

Contacted, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam said he knew nothing in this regard.

On Sunday, Latif was sacked as posts and