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"We've been able to find through our quizzing that in the construction of embankments, Bangladesh Water Development Board showed gross negligence," Muhammad Munir Chowdhury, director general of Anti-Corruption Commission, told reporters at his office.

BWDB officials also admitted of irregularities in implementation of projects under which the embankments were constructed, Munir added.

The ACC boss told these after he led the quizzing of BWDB DG Jahangir Kabir, Additional DG Abdul Hai Baqui, Superintendent Engineer Harun ur Rashid and Chief Engineer Abdul Hai.

Three other government officials BWDB Additional Chief Engineer Nurul Islam, Executive Engineer Akhtar Uddin and water resources ministry's Joint Secretary Khalilur Rahman were also quizzed yesterday as part of the same investigation.

For years, embankments in haor areas have been damaged by floodwater, submerging low-lying areas and affecting crops. Locals often blame negligence and corruption in the construction of the embankments.

The ACC sent a letter to the water resources ministry in April last year when the eroded embankments gave way to floodwater. It asked the ministry to investigate the matter. The ministry was also asked to submit a report in this regard within 10 working days.

The ministry, in its reply sent to the ACC in the last week of February this year, said the embankments were damaged by rats making holes. The commission didn't find the reply satisfactory.

The seven government officials were summoned for questioning regarding the matter.

"We're doing our own enquiry. We'll follow the next legal steps," Munir said, adding that BWDB failed to monitor the construction of embankment.

"It's too early to say whether any graft had taken place at the time," he said.

A total of 2.72 lakh people have been affected by the devastating flash flood in haor areas of Sunamganj this year due to damages of embankments.

Wishing anonymity, an ACC official said had the ministry taken necessary steps last year following the ACC's enquiry, the devastation would not have taken place this year.

On May 2, BWDB suspended three engineers over allegations of corruption in building and repairing embankments in the haor region.

Republicans

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Care Act and allowing US states to opt out of many of the law's key health benefit guarantees.

Some 20 Republicans voted in opposition, along with all Democrats, in the most contentious congressional vote of Trump's young presidency.

Eyeing a victory, a jubilant Trump tweeted during the vote that, if successful, Republicans would gather for "big press conference at the beautiful Rose Garden of the White House" immediately afterwards.

The bill's passage is a conservative dream seven years in the making; doing away with a reform which Republicans accuse of sending health premiums soaring while reducing options for millions of Americans.

An earlier version of the plan to repeal Obamacare collapsed in March, torpedoed by opposition from both moderates and conservatives in the Republican party -- and dealing the president one of the most stinging setbacks since he took office.

In extraordinary scenes in the House chamber, Republicans clapped and cheered while Democrats shouted their disapproval.

"We can continue with the status quo or we can put this collapsing law behind us. End this failed experiment," House Speaker Paul Ryan declared on the House floor.

"This bill delivers on the promises that we have made to the American people," Ryan said, referring to the relentless campaign pledges by most Republicans, including Trump last year, to do everything they could to repeal and replace the reforms that came into law in 2010.

"A lot of us have been waiting seven years to cast this vote," added.

UPHILL BATTLE IN SENATE
Republican leadership endured strong criticism from Democrats and several Republicans for rushing the legislation through without extended debate.

The measure now heads to the US Senate, where it faces an uphill battle. "Where's the score?" Democrats hollered, referring to the lack of a budget office estimate of the legislation's cost for the federal government.

Republicans including Trump had campaigned relentlessly on the pledge to dismantle the 2010 reforms. Democrats counter that Obamacare, as it is known, helped 20 million Americans gain health coverage and saved thousands of lives by barring insurers from denying policies to people with pre-existing conditions.

Probes stop for silence

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and the next couple of days over fierce clashes. Police have so far submitted charge sheets in 20 of the cases to two courts in Narayanganj and Bagerhat.

As many as 3,416 people, including leaders and activists of Hefajat, Jamaat-e-Islami and BNP, were named in the 83 cases. Besides, 81,560 anonymous people were also made accused.

Of the 53 cases, including seven for murder, recorded in the capital, 15 were being probed by the Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police and 33 by different police stations, said DMP sources.

"Investigations remain stuck as the government is not showing any interest in taking the cases forward," a top official at the police headquarters told The Daily Star requesting anonymity.

He said they would move the cases forward only after receiving a decision from the higher authorities. Charge sheets could be placed in some of the cases, but it would take time, added the official.

DMP Additional Commissioner Monirul Islam said they couldn't complete the investigations as it was taking time to identify many of the anarchists from across the country and ascertain their role in the mayhem.

"Police identified the masterminds, but were yet to identify those who directly took part in the attacks," Monirul, also the DMP spokesperson, told reporters on Tuesday.

Hefajat-e-Islam Organising Secretary Azizul Haque Islamabadi said their movement was not against the government, but against the atheists.

He claimed that the government used police to attack their "peaceful rally" which led to the deaths of some and injuries of several hundred other Hefajat leaders and activists.

"During a recent meeting with the prime minister, our leaders requested her to withdraw the false cases," he told The Daily Star.

Although Hefajat claimed that

2,000 of its leaders and activists were killed in the incident, the government put the death toll at 13, including three policemen.

The Hefajat could not provide names and addresses of its men who it claimed to have been killed.

CASES, ARRESTS
As police and other security forces flushed out several thousand Hefajat men from the capital's Shapla Chattar at dead of night on May 5, they clashed with law enforcers at different places while returning home.

The police, government officials, relatives of the victims, Islamist leaders, businessmen, shop owners, employees of different offices and political parties filed the 83 cases against Hefajat and Jamaat men.

The charges in the cases include overstaying in Shapla Chattar area, attacking law enforcers and people with firearms and explosives, attacking police stations with firearms and crude bombs, attacking government offices, banks and setting those on fire, torching the holy Quran, Hadith and other Islamic books, looting such books and hurting the religious sentiments of the Muslims.

According to police, law enforcers arrested 107 accused, including some Hefajat leaders. However, most of them are on bail now.

Hefajat General Secretary Junaid Babunagari, the main accused in the sub-inspector Shahjahan murder case, was arrested on May 6 in 2013. He secured bail on May 29 that year on health grounds.

Shahjahan was killed during a clash between Hefajat men and law enforcers in Motijheel.

During interrogation, Babunagari admitted to police that activists of Hefajat, Jamaat, BNP and its front organisations were involved in the anarchy, said court sources.

Harun bin Izhar Chowdhury, son of Hefajat's Nayeb-e-Ameer Mufti Izharul Islam, was also arrested. But he too was freed on bail.

Road safety isn't even

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preamble," said noted economist and researcher Hossain Zillur while moderating the discussion at the Brac Centre Inn.

A modern law to bring in discipline on roads was needed but the draft law showcased bureaucratic mindset, he said.

"It provides disproportionately voluminous punishment for even petty offences but then it treats all kinds of offences under this law bailable and compoundable making the entire proposition a farce," he said.

"The new law has no mention of safety ...," said Ilias Kanchan, who has been fighting for safe roads as chairman of Nirapad Sarak Chai movement since 1993.

The proposed law has no written goal, said Faruk Talukder Soheli, chairman of Bangladesh Bus-Truck Owners Association. "This is an aimless law ...," he said at another discussion.

Criticising the provision for punishments for failing to stop at red lights, updating fitness certificates, and overloading, he termed the law discriminatory.

"Is it acceptable that one will face two years imprisonment for red light violation when there is no signal light based traffic system in Dhaka?" he said castigating the provision for three years imprisonment and Tk 3 lakh fine for just one kilogram of overload.

All provisions which are not realistic should be omitted from the law, he said.

He said the day this law comes into effect, several lakh professional drivers would be disqualified due to an additional requirement of Public Service Vehicles licence.

The proposed law mentions qualified professional drivers. "What is the government's contribution in making qualified drivers? Driving licence can be purchased at various BRTA training centres," said Mokhlesur Rahman, organising secretary to Bangladesh Road Transport Sramik Federation.

The law is vague and weak and does not reflect people's aspirations, said Manjuly Kazi, widow of media specialist Mishuk Munier, who died in a road crash.

Secretary General Mozammel Haque Chowdhury of Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity and lawyer Sara Hossain also spoke.

At another discussion, Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan, who heads the Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Sramik Federation, said several clauses in the draft law were inconsistent, which was not acceptable to the transport owners and workers as well as the people.

Citing an example, he said the draft law mentions that only departmental actions would be taken against an engineer if an accident happened due to faulty road, "which is discriminatory".

"Overall, this act is not a good act. We want a law which is acceptable to all, transport owners, workers and the people and which will be realistic," he said. Khandaker Enayet Ullah, secretary

general of the Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association, said the road transport ministry did not consider any of their recommendations made prior to making of the draft.

Golam Kuddus, president of Sammilito Sangskritik Jote, said, "Those undemocratic and unrealistic clauses of the law should be scrapped. We want a law which is passenger friendly and which can be implemented easily."

He suggested fixing the working hours of drivers, workers; displaying the fare rates inside buses; and reviewing educational qualification of drivers prior to renewing licences of existing drivers.

Razekuzzaman Raton, general secretary of Samajtantrik Sramik Front, said the purpose of the law must be defined whether it has been enacted to punish someone, to bring discipline in this sector, or to create awareness.

"Otherwise tendency to violate laws will grow," he said, adding, "Simultaneously, corruption will increase among government officials who deal with this sector."

Architect Ahsan Habib said many accidents happen in the country due to poorly designed and built roads and highways but the draft law says nothing about it. "The law is a farce," he said.

Journalist Naimul Islam Khan, former secretary Abu Alam Md Shahid Khan, Communist Party leader Ruhin Hossain Prince, general secretary of Bangladesh Road Transport Workers' Federation Osman Ali also spoke.

Queen

FROM PAGE 20

According to MailOnline, the Queen has a deeply private personal account, with a secret friend list.

Like her mother, Elizabeth II reportedly loves chatting away on the phone.

But unlike her mother, our Queen is up to speed with the latest tech, including a lightweight smartphone.

She's also been said to be able to text on it.

The encrypted mobile is reportedly one of the most sophisticated in the world. It's allegedly impervious to hackers.

The two people she reportedly chats to the most are Princess Anne, her daughter, and John Warren, her horse-racing guru and son-in-law of the Queen's great friend, the late Earl of Caenarvon.

You might not have heard of him, but you will probably recognise his house, Highclere Castle in Berkshire - it's the real Downton Abbey.

Angela Kelly, her P.A., keeps the phone charged at all times so the Queen never has to shout round the palace for an iPhone cable.

She also has a laptop, and even an iPad...

Devastatingly, the Queen is not on Twitter - but the popular parody account, @Queen_UK is.

HAOR FISHERMEN

50,000 get into VGF programme

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has brought 50,000 flood-affected fishermen of the haor region under the Vulnerable Group Feeding programme.

Under the safety net scheme, each fisherman would be provided with 30kg of rice and Tk 500 a month, Relief and Disaster Management Minister Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury told journalists after an inter-ministerial meeting at the ministry yesterday.

Relief and Disaster Management Secretary Shah Kamal said the government already began providing assistance to 3.3 lakh people affected by the flashfloods in the Sylhet region, and the 50,000 fishermen were the new inclusion in the scheme.

According to a government report presented at the meeting, the recent disaster in the haors across six districts and floods in Nature and Brahmanbaria have left 18,205 houses damaged fully or partially.

Inundation of 2.5 lakh hectares of land caused a loss of about 7.5 lakh tonnes of rice, 214 tonnes of fish, 4,000 ducks and four buffaloes. Some 8.5 lakh families were affected by the recent disaster.

Boy commits suicide failing SSC tests

A CORRESPONDENT, Shariatpur

A boy allegedly killed himself yesterday after failing in his SSC exams.

Shamim, son of Shaheed Kha of Kulkuri village under Damudda upazila in Shariatpur, committed suicide by taking poison at his house around 4:00pm, locals said.

Shamim, who appeared in the exam from Damudda Muslim Pilot High School, failed in math and accounting, said neighbours.

Officer-in-charge of Damudda Police Station Mahbubur Rahman said they were looking into the matter.

House passes

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"Bangladesher Muktijudder Itihas Bikritiikoron Oporadh Ain" to prevent distortion of the history of 1971.

The draft bill will be placed before the cabinet soon and will be passed in the ongoing parliament, he added.

Bappy's resolution said, "Those who deny the mass killing do not believe in the country's independence and sovereignty. They don't respect our constitution. So, they must be punished..."

Anisul Huq hailed the resolution saying the lawmaker's statement in the proposal was "historical truth".

Duck farmers

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Like Rubel, thousands of duck farmers in Sylhet division fear they might lose their ducks, but after almost a month of flash flood, some are hoping the worst is behind them now.

According to the Department of Livestock Services there are 3572 duck farms in Sylhet division among which 2707 are in Sunamganj, 457 in Habiganj, 292 in Moulvibazar and 116 in Sylhet district.

The livestock department considers a business as a farm only if it has at least a thousand ducks and there are thousands of smaller farmers in the haor areas which remain outside their purview because of the size of their business.

Mansur Ahmed, a duck farmer from Sylhet Sadar upazila, has been farming for 10 years. However, he remains a small farmer and fears losing his investment if the outbreak hits his farm.

According to the livestock department, duck farms are prone to duck cholera in this season when paddy plants are submerged in the haor for processing.

Md Giyas Uddin, Sylhet divisional deputy director of the Department of Livestock Services, said there was a sign of duck cholera outbreak in the haor areas recently but that situation was contained and the water now is safe for ducks.

However, many regular duck farmers have stopped farming and some didn't even start in fear of the "mysterious" deaths, he said.

"We are encouraging the farmers to resume farming," Giyas said.

Noise not needed

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education are two big achievements of the group.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's recent support to Hefajat's demand for removal of the statue of justice from the Supreme Court premises and the government's shelving of plans to reform Qawmi madrasa education also made the group happy.

Besides, the cases filed against Hefajat men in connection of Shapla Chattar violence in 2013 remain stalled. Hefajat leaders say they don't worry about the cases as they have an "understanding" with the government.

Ashraf Ali Nizampuri claimed that the government had to compromise with them because of their "strong position".

"We have reached such a position that we can put pressure on the government to meet our demands," he said.

In the last four years, Hefajat remained almost silent over their 13-point demand. According to some of its central leaders, the government has convinced them to refrain from taking to the streets pressing for those demands.

Hefajat also no longer speaks against the government for what they said was "brutal action against their activists" on the night of May 5, 2013.

It earlier even claimed that the government had carried out "genocide by killing thousands of its men on May 5 and in the early hours of May 6".

HATHAZARI TO MOTIJHEEL

The organisation appeared on the scene first in 2009, protesting the draft national women development policy that provided for women's inheritance rights equal to men.

A year later, it demanded cancellation of the proposed national education policy that focused on secular curriculum for schools and colleges.

Headquartered in Darul Uloom Moinul Islam Madrasa in Hathazari of Chittagong, Hefajat took the centre stage as a force opposed to Shahbagh Gonojagoron Mancha in 2013.

Bloggers and online activists spearheaded the unprecedented Shahbagh movement and formed the Gonojagoron Mancha, demanding death penalty for war criminal Abdul Quader Mollah, who was awarded life term imprisonment by a special tribunal.

After the February 15 killing of Rajib, a blogger who was branded an atheist, Hefajat started to allege that some of the Mancha activists were involved in publishing blog posts offending "Muslim's religious feelings".

Hefajat men marched towards Dhaka and held a rally on April 6, 2013 at Shapla Chattar in Motijheel to press for their 13-point demand which included enactment of anti-blasphehy law and measures for stringent punishment of "atheist bloggers".

They returned a month later and occupied Shapla Chattar on May 5, 2013. Paltan and Motijheel areas were plunged into mayhem as unruly Hefajat men burned down and vandalised public and private properties and clashed with law enforcers.

Its activists were driven out from the Shapla Chattar in the early hours of May 6 by the law enforcement agencies. At least 39 people were killed in the two days' violence.

'PRESSURE GROUP'

In 2013, the law ministry said six out of the 13 demands went against the constitution and the remaining seven were well covered by existing laws.

But the current situation has given rise to impression among many that the government softened its stance on Hefajat.

BNP leaders publicly alleged that the government is maintaining good relations with Hefajat to play the religion card. However, insiders say the BNP high command is worried at the latest developments as the party itself used to count on pro-Islamic sentiments in electoral politics.

16th edition of Business

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in recognition of their financial success and contributions to the economy.

This year's awards will be handed out in five categories -- the Best Financial Institution, Enterprise of the Year, Outstanding Woman in Business, Business Person of the Year, and Lifetime achievement.

Water Resources Minister Anisul Islam Mahmud is expected to hand over the trophies to the winners, while Chandra Shekhar Ghosh, founder and CEO of Sandhan Bank in India, is the keynote speaker of the award ceremony. Chandra Shekhar was a former Dhaka University student.

DHL Express, the world's leading logistics company, and The Daily Star, the leading English-language newspaper of Bangladesh, initiated the awards in 2000.

The awards were created to recognise and generate public recognition of the achievements and positive contributions of businesses and individuals, who have not only grown but have expanded the economy with them.

The awards also aim to create an environment of excellence and com-

petitiveness that would drive the members of the business community to achieve greater heights of productivity, efficiency, financial discipline and modern management.

Over the years, the awards shaped up into the most prestigious event in Bangladesh's business community.

The past winners include business leaders Samson H Chowdhury of Square Group, Amjad Khan Chowdhury of Pran-RFL Group, and Muhammed Aziz Khan of Summit Group.

Enterprises such as ACL, BSRM, MM Ispahani and Bengal Plastic Industries, and financial institutions like EBL, Mutual Trust Bank, Pubali Bank, Brac Bank and IDLC were also awarded.

Lifetime achievement awards were also bestowed on those who have made a difference through their service. The previous winners in the category include the country's first finance secretary M Matiul Islam, late MA Samad of Bangladesh General Insurance Company and Laila Rahman Kabir of Kedarpur Tea Company.

Referring to two meetings between the PM and Islamic clerics, before and after her India tour, BNP chief Khaleda Zia on April 12 in a press conference alleged that those were held to "exploit the sentiments of the Muslims".

About the meeting between Hasina and the Qawmi madrasa-based clerics, Khaleda said the PM has indulged in "religion-based politics."

On April 13, Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader said his party did not "compromise or forge an alliance with" Hefajat-e-Islam.

"Those who are alleging that we are using religion in politics or claiming that we have compromised with the communal forces are in fact the ones who are using religion as a political weapon," he added.

The ruling party leader also said "True progressiveness is the ability to make realistic decisions considering the sentiments of the people."

In this context, a discussion surfaced among different quarters that Hefajat might emerge as a political party. The organisation leaders rules out any such possibility.

"Boro huzur [Hefajat supremo Ahmed Shafi] does not have any plan to turn Hefajat into a political party as it may curtail our power to bargain with the government," said Hefajat leader Maulana Zafrullah Khan.

Ashraf Ali Nizampuri added: "We always want to act like a pressure group, not as a political party."

"We will put pressure on the government whenever we will see any anti-Islamic activities or campaign in the country."

He also said the government is yet to realise any of their 13 demands.

"After forming committees in all upazilas, Hefajat will take to the street if necessary to get its 13-point demand fulfilled," he added.

SOME KEY FIGURES
Senior leaders of at least seven political parties, including five registered with the Election Commission, have been involved with Hefajat since its inception.

Mufti Izharul Islam Chowdhury, chairman of a faction of Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ), a prime accused in a case relating to an explosion that killed three people at a Chittagong madrasa in 2013, is regarded as a co-founder of Hefajat.

Four components of the BNP-led 20-party alliance -- Jamiat e Olama e Islam, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish, Khelafat Majlish and another faction of IOJ -- have their men in the central body of Hefajat.

Nur Hossain Kasemi, secretary general of Jamiat e Olama e Islam, is the convener of Hefajat Dhaka city unit and a nayeb-e-ameer of Hefajat central.

IOJ is divided into four factions. The faction which is in the BNP-led alliance is led by Abdur Raqib, a nayeb-e-ameer of Hefajat.

Abdul Latif Nejami, another nayeb-e-ameer of Hefajat, is the chairman of another faction of IOJ. He left the BNP after the January 5, 2014 elections and is likely to join a proposed alliance led by Ershad.

Maulana Ishak, chairman of Khelafat Majlish, is a central leader of Hefajat while Maulana Zafrullah Khan, ameer of Bangladesh Khelafat Andolon, now leaning towards AL, is a joint secretary.

Besides, top leaders of different other political parties, including Nejam-e-Islami and Khelafat e Islam, are also placed in the central committee of Hefajat. They play significant roles in the decision-making process of the group.

It is widely believed in the political arena that the BNP was trying to get a section of Hefajat leaders to stay in Shapla Chattar on May 5, 2013 and wage movement to oust the government. On the evening of May 5, BNP leaders, including Khaleda Zia, urged city dwellers to stand by the Hefajat men.