Promotion, changes in civil admin

FROM PAGE 1

another official loyal to the four-party alliance assuming the post, noted many former and serving bureaucrats.

The present government has not only changed rules for contractual appointment and promotion several times to benefit the officers with allegiance to ruling parties but also violated those repeatedly when they felt it necessary for the same reason.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, in her first meeting with secretaries on October 17, 2001, said: "We will ensure that all appointments and promotions at the state's executive level are made on the basis of merit, competence, seniority, honesty and experience."

But the reality for the last four years contradicts every aspect of her statement.

ENGINEERING IN ADMINISTRAION

Coming to power in October 2001, the government initiated the process of gaining complete administrative control.

It was initiated first to fulfil the four-party alliance's electoral promises and to form policy and carry out decisions unhindered and, secondly, to ensure full administrative support during the crucial period between the transfer of power to the interim government in October 2006 and the declaration of election results in 2007.

To realise their objective, the government pursued a policy of removing any official who would not follow blindly their instructions and thus become an obstacle to their aim.

These officials were forced into retirement, made outcast as OSD, sent to 'dump postings', and were prevented from gaining promotion under the government's ever changing promotion guidelines.

It later placed the loyal officials to all key posts by simply promoting them or even using the special presidential quota when necessary.

Although 10 promotions were permitted within the presidential quota, the limit on the quota was lifted after the present government came to power to give the president unprecedented and unhindered power to appoint, promote or sack officials.

A number of officials also received back to back extensions after they had reached their retirement age.

The government has completed filling up 95% of the available posts for ministry secretaries with their loyal officials. Majority of the secretary posts have been filled by the 1977 and 1979 batches. Seventeen of the secretaries and acting secretaries belong to the 1977 batch while 21 to the 1979 batch while six officials of the 1973 batch have yet to be promoted to the rank of secretary.

Some secretaries have also received the signal to participate in the next election and have already started electioneering. Cabinet Secretary ASM Abdul Halim indicated publicly in Jamalpur on December 31 that he would participate in the next general election.

Meantime, on indication that they may compete in the next parliamentary election, people of their constituencies have started meeting PM's secretary Khondoker Shahidul Haq and Information Secretary Barrister Haider Ali at their offices.

PROMOTION

Immediately after coming to power, the government sent 68 officials including 41 freedom fighters to forced retirement.

Cancelling the promotion rule of 1998, a new rule was formulated secretly in 2002. According to the amended rule, a provision of awarding marks for discipline and educational qualification was introduced besides consideration of the annual confidential report (ACR). c

The previous rule barred promotion if there were any adverse remarks about discipline in the ACR. But it had no provision of awarding marks for clean disciplinary records.

The new rule introduced a provision of awarding 20 marks if there is no adverse remark in anyone's ACR. So the government might easily take this privilege to award the marks to those who are loyal to it.

The government issued gazette notification on the new rules on June 11, 2002 and promoted 170 deputy secretaries to joint secretaries two days later, putting aside about 200 officials whose promotion was due.

The coalition government secretly amended the rules again on November 14 the same year and on February 8 the next year.

On February 10 and 16, 393 officials were promoted to the post of deputy secretary and again 322 officials were ignored.

Ninety-seven officials were promoted as additional secretaries against 61 vacant posts on August 27, 2003, ignoring 104 officials, while some of the promotees were given the office of secretary.

The government promoted 48 officials as joint secretaries the same day and 277 officials were overlooked.

On June 15, 2004, 84 officials got promotion as joint secretaries and 78 others were ignored. Eighteen officials were promoted as secretaries on February 15 last year, although there were 29 others whose promotion was due.

On March 5, 2005, 61 officials were promoted as joint secretaries bypassing 31 and on April 21, 337 were promoted as deputy secretaries 50.

Twenty-one officials who were deputy commissioners in 2001 were made secretaries on July 28 last year. In an unprecedented manner, these officials rushed to the Prime Minister's Office to express gratitude to the premier.

On November 28, 48 officials were promoted as additional secretaries but 46 others were passed over.

On January 27 this year, 387 officials were promoted as deputy secretaries and 96 were neglected.

Sources said a merit list of 220 officials was prepared earlier in January for the promotion but 96 of them were excluded on January 27.

Ninety senior assistant secretaries of the 1985 batch, who did not receive due promotion, have recently sent letters to the establishment secretary, saying they were not awarded promotion in a calculative move.

Some 30 officials who served as deputy secretaries three years ago are now acting as secretaries. But the original rule says a deputy secretary needs to serve in the post for at least five years, three years as joint secretary and two years as additional secretary before being promoted as a secretary.

Meantime, incidents of tampering with marks had happened while the sheet for promotion was being prepared.

The establishment ministry is taking departmental action against 12 of 15 deputy secretaries, who received promotion on January 27, for tampering with their ACR.

The forgery came to light when officials were checking two copies of the ACR -- one of which is kept at the establishment ministry vault and the other in the file for each individual official. The ACR of the 12 individuals' files were tampered with.

The establishment ministry has initiated the process of taking punitive action against them.

CONTRACTUAL APPOINTMENTS

Till date, about 238 officials who were appointed on contract basis are serving in the administration. Many others have completed their service. Soon after assuming power, the government amended the rule of contract basis appointment and promotion under presidential quota.

Cancelling the Senior Service Pool of 1989, the provision of limitless appointment and promotion to the posts of additional secretary under the presidential quota has been made under section 5 of the government's 2002 order.

Earlier, appointment and promotion to only 10 percent posts of deputy secretary and above under the presidential quota was possible.

Now, although there is a provision of applying this only once for an individual, such appointments and promotions are being made regularly.

The principal secretary to the prime minister has been given contractual appointment on completion of each term until fifth time, two other secretaries four times, three others three times and nine twice.

A secretary-level official has meanwhile been appointed on a contract basis and asked to continue service until further orders.

There is no provision for appointing the cabinet secretary on contract basis. But the incumbent cabinet secretary has twice been allowed to retain his post on contract, which is a clear violation of all norms and traditions.

Besides, it is a post for the promotees.

While appointing officials on contract basis is on, a large number of officials are waiting for promotion. The BCS (Bangladesh Civil Service) cadres of 1986 batch are toiling in the same posts for 20 long years.

A glaring example of contractual appointment is that of a director general (deputy secretary rank) of the PMO as a joint secretary. This director general had to retire earlier as a deputy secretary as he did not achieve necessary 85 marks for promotion.

But the government later appointed him as joint secretary on presidential quota. It was said in his appointment letter that it would be applicable once and should not be quoted as an example.

But he was appointed an additional secretary on a contract basis just a few days later and was subsequently given the charge of an acting secretary of the social welfare ministry.

A joint secretary was, however, available in the ministry who was senior to him by three years.

OSD CULTURE

No fewer than 218 officials are now working as officers on special duty. Skilled and experienced officers virtually now see them as sinecures.

Some of them were attached to different directorates, departments and ministries and were virtually made OSD.

After assuming power, the current government immediately took punitive measures against the officials who joined the so-called Janatar Mancha in 1996.

Among them, 185 officials have faced departmental action and over 68 officers including 41 freedom fighters were forced to retirement.

Hundreds of officers were made OSD only for having alleged links with the previous government.

The officers who served as the private secretaries or assistant private secretaries to ministers or were attached to the PMO were victimised by the BNP-led coalition government.

The PS to the former foreign minister was made an OSD and he retired after staying three years in that position.

A joint secretary who served as the chief of a directorate and has been an OSD since November 19, 2001, told The Daily Star: "It's punishment not only for me but also for my family, as it affects my social life."

"I have been passing a horrible life over the last four years. Without anything to do, I am getting salary."

RCC

FROM PAGE 16

Rajshahi Golam Arif Tipu and Member Mosarraf Hossain Akhunji among others attended the programme.

Reading out the report, CCC Member Prof Chowdhury Sarwar Jahan said the RCC authorities have been notified of the report a month ago, but they have yet to take any heed of the recommendations.

Ninety-seven percent said they are badly affected by mosquito menace while 91 percent said there is no quality control over foods in city restaurants and markets.

Among the people surveyed, 66 percent complained that there have been no measures from the RCC to check mosquitoes in the last three months. Five percent said the city corporation did not take any steps to this end in about two years while three percent said the RCC has been inactive for the last three years.

About 91 percent of the respondents said the RCC never took any initiative to ensure the food quality in the city.

Besides, eight percent interviewed in the survey said they had to pay Tk 55 for obtaining a citizenship certificate while 12 percent people had to count Tk 52 as bribe to secure licenses for trade, vehicles and bidding, reveals the report.

Eighty percent people said the city corporation remains indifferent to indiscriminate slaughter of animals.

The report said 45 percent complained that the ward commissioners play biased role during social arbitration.

At least 54 percent said the roads are dirty and they are not cleaned regularly while 73 percent described as poor the corporation's performance in waste disposal.

About 61 percent of the people covered by the survey said the condition of drainage in the city is abysmal and is the reason for severe water logging over nine months of the year.

The survey included a number of recommendations to improve the services. Those include open budgeting, well-devised work plans and proper monitoring system. Besides, the report stressed the need for the community leaders' participation in development programmes.

BGMEA

FROM PAGE 16

Of the newly appointed staff, seven are team leaders and the rest are assistants to the team leaders, sources added.

Ten fire safety teams will be formed to work in Dhaka, Savar, Gazipur and Narayanganj while two others will work in Chittagong.

After a short orientation course, the teams will start their work simultaneously in the country.

Under the programme, mock fire drills with evacuation will be practiced and adequate fire safety equipment will be ensured at the factories.

BGMEA is likely to issue a circular on Saturday asking all the member factories to depute a representative from the management and another from the workers to assist the safety teams.

When contacted, BGMEA Vice-president (Finance) Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury Arun told UNB that the main focus of the programme will be to inform the workers that fire needs time to spread and the workers usually have enough time to make their exit from a scene of fire if they do not scramble.

"Practical lessons will be given by setting mock fires and asking the workers to get out of a factory in a disciplined manner," Arun said, describing the safety strategy.

"Stampede caused by panic is the main reason behind deaths, rather than the fire itself," he said adding that the owners concerned will also be trained simultaneously.

The BGMEA executive said they have already appointed a retired principal of the fire service academy and some other retired fire brigade personnel to strengthen the safety teams.

He said the special programme will continue in full swing for the next three months. "We may extend the time for another three months if we fail to cover all the factories during the stipulated timeframe," he said.

Meanwhile, the 10 monitoring teams formed earlier with each team led by a BGMEA director will continue to work in parallel with the safety teams to ensure fire safety and deal with other compliance issues at RMG units.

Hunt for two Shura

FROM PAGE 16

two top JMB men were sent to all the outposts along the border.

"Suspected persons and vehicles are also being checked," he added.

COMILLA SEARCH

Over 250 uniformed and plainclothes policemen conducted the house-to-house search after closing off the town's Housing Estate area at about 2:00am yesterday.

The raid was launched, acting on information provided by three militants including Comilla district JMB commander Rangila alias Sohel during police interrogation.

"We conducted the raid on the basis of some specific information, but we did not find any militant or explosives," Aurangjeb, superintendent of police in Comilla who led the operation, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Earlier on March 13, JMB bomb expert Shakil alias Mollah Omar died in Rab fire and three of his family members were killed in bomb explosions during a raid in Comilla town.

The elite crime busters also arrested JMB supremo Abdur Rahman's son Nabil Rahman, JMB cadre Alamgir alias Bijoy alias Shaikat, commander of Comilla district JMB Rangila alias Sohel and Ehsar [full-time activist] Abdus Samad Mintu.

Our Nilphamari correspondent reports: A Panchagarh court on Wednesday sentenced four JMB members to 20 years rigorous imprisonment and fined Tk 20 thousand each. In default, they will spend one more year in prison.

Saidul Islam alias Shakhawat, 25, Hamidul Islam 20, Zahurul Haque, 21 and Mohammad Firoj were convicted in a case filed under explosives act.

Police arrested them at a rented house on the outskirts of Panchagarh town with JMB documents and bomb-making materials on May15, 2003.

Of them, Saidul Islam is behind bars while the rest are on the run since they got out on bail about two years ago.

UK cracks down

FROM PAGE 16

people who are supposed to love them. It's an absolutely horrendous wrench," Sanghera told AFP.

She said there was a "strong preference" within families of victims she helps to look for suitable husbands "back home", with the young woman easing the groom's passage into Britain as part of the deal.

Her Karma Nirvana refuge in Derby, central England, takes an average 40 support calls a month, and over 70 percent of her clients have issues relating to forced marriage.

She advocates warning children of the dangers in schools before they start to come under family pressure.

Sanghera recalled how, at the age of 14, she was shown a photograph of the man she was due to marry.

"They deprived me of my freedom. I suffered the emotional and physical abuse, and I ran away.

"You feel guilty, depressed and very isolated. You lose your family overnight and you are a victim made to feel like the perpetrator," she said.

The only current legal recourse concerning forced marriages is arresting people for offences such as rape and kidnap.

The Forced Marriages Unit -- set up by the Home Office and Foreign Office -- has dealt with more than 1,250 cases brought forward by troubled spouses or relatives since it started in 2000. However, the FMU, which undertakes rescue missions in extreme cases, fears the true number may be far higher.

Sufian Miah told AFP he was 20 when a cry for help from his terrified girlfriend Shipa landed in his letter box. It had been written on a tissue in an aeroplane toilet as her family took her to Sylhet in eastern Bangladesh with a view to a forced marriage.

Now his wife, Shipa, from west London, was 18 when she was bundled on the flight. She secretly handed the tissue to an air hostess as a desperate last resort.

"She said she had been taken against her will, her life was in danger and she didn't want to go back," said 31-year-old Miah, from Bromley in southeast London.

"Her mental state was absolutely gone. Her independence had been taken away."

"Devastated, angry and frustrated", he called every number he thought could help, from local MPs to Amnesty International, and flew to Bangladesh in a bid to rescue her.

He found her by chance at the house of one of her cousins and spoke to her through a window, vowing to get her out.

He said the Bangladeshi police issued an arrest warrant for him on suspicion of kidnap.

He took her case to the Bangladesh Supreme Court. "Eventually her family had no choice but to give up," Miah said.

British Asian actor Ameet Chana, 30, who starred in the 2002 film "Bend It Like Beckham" and the BBC television soap "EastEnders" and helps campaign on the issue, was shocked that 15 percent of the Forced Marriages Unit's cases were men.

"If you're a bloke, a bit macho, how can you come forward and tell someone you're in a forced marriage?" he told AFP.

"They are taking place under our noses in this country. It's good to stay traditional, but forced marriage is not part of any culture."

"The older generation need to realise there's a way of doing things in the West -- and it's not always the way that it used to be back home."

Attempts to break

FROM PAGE 16

Russia and China fear involvement by the 15-member council, which can impose sanctions, could escalate the situation and lead to punitive measures, and even justify military action, although the draft statement carries no threat of punishment.

Russia, backed by China, wants to delete large sections of the draft statement. Britain and France are willing to amend the proposal if that would give it a chance of being adopted.

In Washington, Rice told reporters, "There is no time for delay in taking up this issue."

"We need to have this statement and to make clear to the Iranians that the international community is united in demanding that Iran return to a posture that is consistent with its international commitments," she said after talks with Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyanni.

Rice said there was an "an erosion of confidence in Iran "because they lied to the IAEA for 18 years."

"If they do want a civil nuclear programme, that's fine. They can have one but not with (uranium) enrichment and reprocessing on Iranian territory," Rice said.

"They need to suspend the activities in which they're engaged and return to negotiations.

Lavrov has made clear the current text would have to be restructured because it removed the issue from the 35-nation board of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

"The draft includes points that effectively lay the groundwork for sanctions against Iran," Lavrov told the Interfax news agency on Wednesday. "We will hardly be able to support this version."

In Beijing, a spokesman for China's foreign ministry was asked about the deadlock at the United Nations after Russian President Vladimir Putin left the Chinese capital, where he held a summit with President Hu Jintao.

"In making any actions or decisions the concerned parties should be focused on whether they truly help to reach a lasting resolution of the Iran nuclear issue, and whether they help the peace and stability of the region," spokesman Qin Gang said.

"That is why we should give diplomacy more time and more space." he added.

If the talks drag on, Britain and France have considered dropping the idea of a council statement, which requires agreement by all 15 members. Instead they would turn the statement into a resolution, which needs nine favourable votes and no veto, and dare Russia and China to vote "no."

6 urea factories

FROM PAGE 1

market price," BCIC Chairman Imaam-Uz-Zaman told The Daily Star recently.

Industry sources said the government imports 4 to 6 lakh tonnes of urea each year at Tk 18,000 a tonne to meet the shortage of urea as BCIC factories cannot fully meet the requirement.

The BCIC now incurs a loss of Tk 240 crore a year in producing 20 lakh tonnes of urea against Tk 140 crore in 1997 as production cost has increased to Tk 6,000 a tonne from Tk 5,500 over this period.

"There has been no revision of BCIC's urea (sale) price since 1997 when it was fixed at Tk 4,800 a tonne, " Imaam-Uz-Zaman noted.

The government has repeatedly turned down in recent years BCIC's plea for upward revision of urea price to bail out its ageing factories from incurring further losses.

"BCIC factories suffer badly due to the wrong urea pricing and subsidy policy for long. While they are forced to sell urea at a price much lower than production cost, they are also being deprived of the subsidy funds," regretted a top BCIC official seeking anonymity.

Urea is now imported at Tk 18,000 per tonne and sold to farmers at Tk 4,800 a tonne, and the price gap of Tk 13,200 per tonne is met from the subsidy allocation.

Officials recalled that urea price in international market was almost the same as BCIC's production cost of Tk 5,500 a tonne in 1996-97 but it has shot up to Tk 18,000 over the last one decade. "But fearing political backlash and farmers' outcry, successive governments in Bangladesh refrained from raising domestic price of the fertiliser," one official said.

For the very existence and economic viability of its six urea factories, the BCIC forwarded several proposals to the industries ministry in the last two years for raising urea price but to no avail, he mentioned.

The BCIC has been unable to pay off over Tk 150 crore gas bills since it is facing a financial crisis, its chairman said.

Fund crisis is also hampering routine maintenance of the ageing urea factories, he added.

'Black night'

FROM PAGE 1

waged an armed struggle against the Pakistani occupation forces following the declaration of independence by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The Pakistani forces arrested Bangabandhu as he, through a wireless message, called upon the people to resist the occupation forces.

Later, Awami League leader MA Hannan and Major Ziaur Rahman (later president of Bangladesh) read out the proclamation of independence on behalf of Bangabandhu, which was broadcast from Kalurghat radio station in Chittagong.

The nine-month long liberation war that was sparked by the brutal invasion on this very night culminated in surrender of the 93,000-strong occupation force on December 16, 1971.

Different socio-cultural and educational organisations have taken up elaborate programmes for tonight to observe the dark night of March 25. Ekattorer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee (The Committee to Uproot Killers and Collaborators of 1971) will bring out a candle-lit procession from Central Shaheed Minar in the capital at 8:00pm today.

The nation will celebrate the 35th anniversary of its independence tomorrow.

Apart from official Independence Day programmes, different socio-cultural and political organisations have chalked out elaborate programmes to mark the day.

Newspapers will bring out special supplements.

Party leaders

FROM PAGE 16

National Advisory Council.

Hordes of party workers, including many women, had stayed up all night outside her residence, since last evening.

This morning many leaders, including local MP Sajjan Kumar, MLA Mukesh Sharma and Delhi University Students Union President Ragini Nayak, egged the crowd shouting anti-BJP/SP slogans and urging the party chief to take back her resignation.

Preparing themselves for a long haul, Congress workers lined up on both sides of the road near her residence, resolving to stick around until Sonia Gandhi relented.

Tigers gunning

FROM PAGE 1

series have enabled them to considerably narrow the gap.

With the series decided, the Bangladesh think-tank has decided to rest opener Javed Omar for the final game while injured Alok Kapali, who twisted his ankle during the third match, is not yet fit to play. The two changes however give middle-order batsman Rajin Saleh and all-rounder Manjarul Islam Rana a chance to play their first match in the series.

Manjarul is likely to play as super-sub while Rajin Saleh is being considered for the openers slot partnering the inform Shahriar Nafees.

TEAMS

BANGLADESH (from): Habibul Bashar (captain), Khaled Mashud (vice-captain), Shahriar Nafees, Aftab Ahmed, Mohammad Ashraful, Rajin Saleh, Mohammad Rafique, Manjarul Islam Rana, Mashrafee Bin Mortuza, Abdur Razzak, Syed Rasel and Shahadat Hossain.

KENYA (from): Steve Tikolo (captain), Thomas Odoyo (vice-captain), Jimmy Kamande, Alfred Luseno, Tanmay Mishra, Hitesh Modi, Collins Obuya, David Obuya, Peter Ongondo, Kennedy Otieno, Maurice Ouma, Kalpesh Patel, Martin Suji and Tony Suj.

Robbers

FROM PAGE 1

adds: Six people including a woman were injured on Thursday night when robbers threw bombs on them at village Agardari in sadar upazila.

The robbers also took away cash and goods worth Tk 1 lakh.

The injured are Tapas Achariya, 30, a former member of Agardari union Parishad, Dipak Achariya, 50, a school teacher, Shibajee Achariya, 60, Shyamal A hariya, 36, Bappi Achariya, 28, and Sheuli Achariya, 25.

The armed robbers attacked the house of Tapas Acharaya and blasted seven bombs. They also beat up the members of the family, police said quoting locals.

12 killed

FROM PAGE 1

personnel immediately started a rescue operation and sent the injured to Pakulla Health Complex and Mirzapur Kumudini Hospital.

The police recovered the bodies of the dead and sent them to a morgue for autopsies. Identities of the dead could not be known immediately.

In the second accident, at least three people including two of a family were killed and 10 others were injured when a Dhaka bound bus from Sirajganj collided head on with a Tangail bound bus from Dhaka on the same highway at Khudirampur area under Tangail sadar upazila around 4:30pm.

The dead are Shamsunnahar, 55, of Badda village under Kalihati upazila in the district and her daughter Nupur, 22, and Abdul Latif, 32, of Daulatpur village under Belkuchi upazila in Sirajganj.

Shamsunnahar and her daughter Nupur died on the spot while Abdul Latif died on the way to Tangail General Hospital.

Two separate cases were filed with Basail and Tangail Sadar police stations in connection with the two accidents.

BSS reports from Natore that three people were killed and seven others injured in two separate road accidents at Banpara on the Natore-Pabna highway in the early hours of yesterday.

The police said four persons, including the driver of a covered van, were injured when it turned turtle at Banpara at 4:00am.

The van, owned by a medicine company, was heading towards Natore from Ishwardi.

In the second accident, which occurred at the same place at 5:15am, three passengers of a mini-truck were killed and three others were injured when the truck also heading towards Natore hit the already overturned covered van.

The dead are Anwarul, 35, son of Naqibuddin of Sakhidarpur under Daulatpur upazila in Kushtia, Mohammad Anwarul, 40, son of Azimuddin Mondal and Belal Uddin.

Elections spending

FROM PAGE 1

to the EC, they mentioned any amount under Tk 5 lakh.

Exceptions occurred with a few candidates from smaller parties.

With another general election drawing nearer, electoral experts and lawmakers fear unauthorised money will again dominate the polls. Still neither the government nor the EC seems to have plans to stop such irregular practices.

"It won't be possible to hold free and fair election if black money continues to influence the ballot," former chief election commissioner (CEC) Justice Sultan Hossain Khan told The Daily Star yesterday.

Justice Khan, also incumbent chairman of the Anti-Corruption Commission, said the commission is considering steps to curb the influence of black money in the next general elections. "Black money is used to buy votes and harness muscle power, destroying the level playing field for the contenders."

"I have already discussed the issue with CEC MA Aziz and suggested upping the ceiling on electoral expenditure," he added.

According to the electoral rules, a candidate must not spend over Tk 5 lakh on electioneering. In case of flouting the rules, a candidate shall be held guilty of a corrupt practice punishable by fine and rigorous imprisonment for up to seven years. The punishment for the offence shall not be less than two years.

But to date, there is not a single example of a person being punished for violating the rules. The EC does not enquire into the statements of electoral expenses. A large number of candidates do not even bother to submit the returns.

Justice Khan said the expenditure returns filled in by the candidates should be checked to see if they were true.

"But as the existing monitoring system is very weak, none has so far been punished for submitting false statements," he observed, adding that the monitoring mechanisms must be strengthened to ensure the elections are held in a free and fair manner.

Lawmakers who really want the elections to be free from influence of black money express frustrations over the reign of illegal money in the polls.

"Things have become so appalling that when we appear before the parliamentary board for nomination the first thing the party high-command enquires about is our financial ability. They want to know how much we can afford to spend," a senior BNP lawmaker said from his experience. A lawmaker of the main opposition AL had almost the same words to say.

Stressing the need for eradicating such crooked practices, a senior AL lawmaker said, "The Election Commission should either withdraw the ceiling or ensure its observance. The ceiling of Tk 5 lakh seem absurd against the background of an escalating price index."

CEC MA Aziz last year said he would propose to the government to raise the ceiling from Tk 5 lakh to 10 lakh. But he has not yet submitted the proposal.

The EC remains helpless against the rampant use of unauthorised money. Even the existing rules meant to rid the electoral race of illegal money are not properly enforced.

During the election period, candidates set up election camps, use vehicles, print posters and leaflets, and mobilise people to seek vote for them, all at a very high cost.

Due to a weak monitoring system, the EC cannot look into whether a candidate is spending beyond the upper limit.

"The Election Commission should take some immediate measures to address the problem. It should work to strengthen its monitoring mechanisms to make the election free from the influence of black money and muscle power," former adviser to the caretaker government M Hafizuddin Khan told The Daily Star.

"The way election disputes are usually resolved does not discourage the candidates from adopting improper practices in the polls. One remains a lawmaker even if he had won the contest by whatever means," Hafizuddin said, talking about the loopholes in the existing procedure for resolving the election disputes.

Former chief election commissioner Abu Hena said reforms in the electoral rules should be considered seriously.

"The government should take measures to bring about some reforms. If it does not seem necessary to them [government], then the Election Commission should take the initiative. The electoral rules should be updated, keeping pace with the changing circumstances," Hena had told The Daily Star earlier.

ACC

FROM PAGE 16

protecting confidentiality of the complainant.

The telephone numbers at which the complainants are requested to complain are 8313884 and 9144584. Alternatively, the complainants will be able to send e-mail to the commission at two e-mail addresses: acc.bangladesh@gmail.com and anticorruption_commiss@yahoo.com.

An ACC source said the advertisement will be gradually published in five national dailies. Later, the advertisement will also be aired on the electronic media.

Earlier, the ACC decided to catch the bribe-takers by entrapping them with the help of possible bribers.

If anybody complains to the commission that bribe has been demanded from him, the ACC team with the help of the complainant himself will entrap the bribe-seeker to catch him red-handed.

After examining all evidences, the bribe-seeker will be handed over to the police and a case named 'Trap Case' will be filed against him.

ACC Chairman Justice Sultan Hossain Khan disclosed that the commission targeted 12 government organisations wherein the watchdog will try to entrap corrupt officials using bribers.

The police, lower courts, land-registry offices, licensing offices, container ports (customs), airports, Chittagong customs, and health and education sectors are among the government divisions where the traps will be laid.

Prices

FROM PAGE 16

At the meat market, each kg broiler chicken was selling at Tk 90. The price of local variety chicken rose by about Tk 30 a kg. One kg beef was selling between Tk 130 and Tk 140.

In the vegetables market, aubergine was being sold for Tk 20-22 a kg, okra Tk 18-20, beans Tk 22-24, jhinga Tk 15-20, bitter gourd Tk 18-20 and tomato Tk 14-16.

'Friendship treaty'

FROM PAGE 1

of Pakistan on this historic occasion. I am sure the leadership of Pakistan will reciprocate," he said at a ceremony to open a new bus link between the two countries.

The bus service is the latest step in attempts to normalise relations between the arch-rivals, who have fought three wars since independence from Britain in 1947.

The nuclear-armed rivals launched a peace bid two years ago which has so far yielded increased transport links but has not yet made headway on the key issue of Kashmir, which is divided between them but claimed by each in full.

Declaring that the transit link had opened a "new chapter" between India and Pakistan, the prime minister waved a green flag to set the bus, carrying 40 passengers and cheered by hundreds of well-wishers, under way.

The bus connects the northern city of Amritsar, seat of Sikhism's holiest shrine the Golden Temple, with the Pakistani town of Nankana Sahib -- birthplace of Guru Nanak Dev, founder of the Sikh religion -- near Lahore city.

"Instead of looking at each other as adversaries we must have the courage to see each other as supporting the other for the realisation of a better tomorrow for all the people of India and Pakistan," said Singh.

"I am convinced we can move forward if all concerned are willing to accept the ground realities, if all concerned take a long view of history and our destiny."

He said he was convinced that it was possible for India and Pakistan to come to a "meaningful" agreement on issues such as the dispute over the Siachen glacier, a border row at Sir Creek and a water dispute in Kashmir.

Pakistan yesterday said a call by the Indian premier for a friendship treaty was a positive step, but insisted that the divided region of Kashmir remains the core issue between the nuclear rivals.

The cautious welcome came after Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh offered a "treaty of peace, security and friendship" and said he was sure Islamabad would reciprocate.

"We believe the speech reflects many positive sentiments and a strong acknowledgement of the need to move forward on Jammu and Kashmir and other issues," foreign office spokeswoman Tasnim Aslam said.

She said Islamabad had always emphasised the need for building confidence with New Delhi, "especially the Jammu and Kashmir dispute which has been at the heart of conflict, mistrust and hostility and which has bedeviled relations between the two countries for such a long time," she said.

But Aslam's insistence that Kashmir remains central to a two-year-old peace process between India and Pakistan was at odds with Singh's assertion that the situation could move forward independently of the issue.

Indian and Pakistani troops remain eyeball to eyeball at Siachen glacier in Kashmir, at 21,000-foot (6,300-metre) the world's highest battlefield.

The two sides also dispute their border at Sir Creek marsh joining western India and Pakistan, and are squabbling over waters that India plans to dam up at Baglihar in its part of divided Kashmir.

"It would be a mistake to link normalisation of other relations with finding a solution to Jammu and Kashmir," said the prime minister.

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has repeatedly said that normalisation of bilateral relations cannot move forward unless the core issue of Kashmir, which India refers to as Jammu and Kashmir, is resolved.

But Singh said it was time to "leave behind the animosities and the misgivings of the past".

The two governments had to "think the unthinkable" and move together in pursuit of a common objective of getting rid of poverty, ignorance and disease that still afflict millions of people in the two countries, he said.