



AL, BNP may agree on reconstituting EC only

Both parties still rigid on other major reform issues

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At the planned talks with BNP, the opposition Awami League (AL) might stick to its objection to Justice KM Hasan as the caretaker government chief and MA Aziz as the chief election commissioner (CEC).

Party sources also said the AL will not budge on its stance that instead of the president, the caretaker government should be in charge of the defence ministry for the sake of a free and fair election.

The BNP, on the other hand, will not concede the opposition's demand for reforms in the caretaker government system.

Under tremendous pressure from different quarters both at home and abroad, the government side however might agree to reconstitute the Election Commission

(EC) and reach a consensus over the demands regarding the reforms of electoral laws, said sources within BNP.

Meanwhile, the schedule for the dialogue has not been made final till 10:30 last night. Sources said that the opposition wants the talks to take place anywhere except the Sangsad Bhaban, any hotel or residence while BNP has proposed that they (secretaries general) can sit at the state guesthouse Padma on Tuesday.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil told The Daily Star at about 9:30pm last night that they have not yet set the date and venue.

Earlier in the day, he said, "I will call him (Bhuiyan) tonight (last night) to talk the time and venue."

But as of 10:30pm, neither Jalil nor Bhuiyan phoned each other to settle the issue.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan last night had a closed-door meeting with senior leaders Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, Moudud Ahmed, Tariqul Islam, MK Anwar, Aminul Haq, Khandakar Mahbubuddin Ahmed, and Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman to devise the party strategies for the dialogue.

Highly placed sources said the ruling party might not compromise on keeping Justice KM Hasan as the chief of the next caretaker government and the defence under the president's jurisdiction.

It might also not accept any changes in the electoral provisions defining the duties of the law enforcers. The provisions were introduced before the 2001 election.

"We will stick to our stance on at least two out of the five demands

regarding the caretaker government system. No way will we approve of Justice Hasan taking over as the chief adviser," a senior opposition leader told The Daily Star last night.

He said the opposition will not move an inch from its demand for reconstitution of the EC.

Another leader of the 14-party said on the first day of the negotiations, Jalil will table the 31-point reforms demand in its entirety. "After knowing the government's response to our proposals, we will decide on which points should we stand our ground in the interest of a credible election," he added.

Secretaries general of the two parties have maintained that they would go to the talks with an open mind and without any preconditions.

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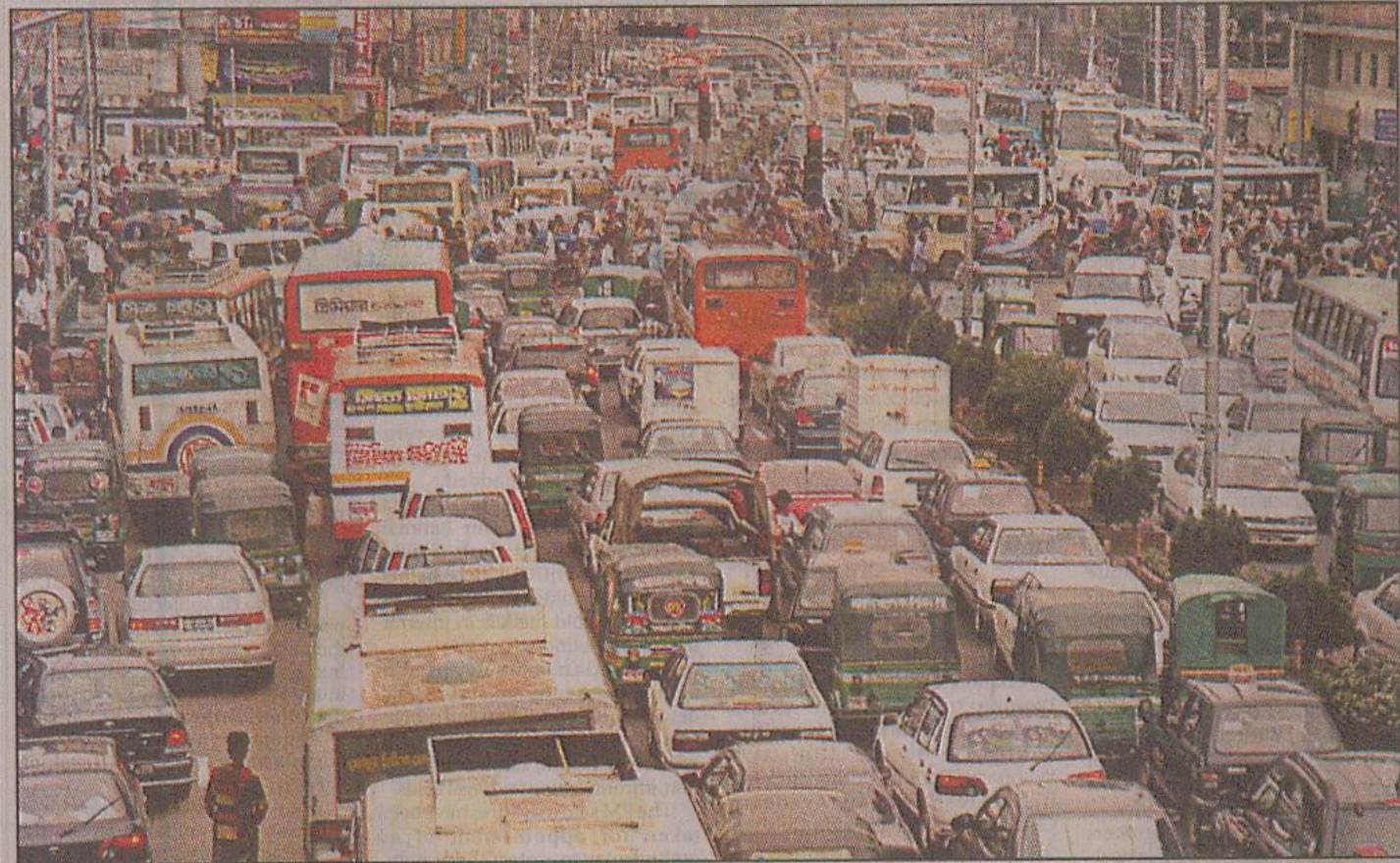


PHOTO: STAR

Vehicles at Kakrail intersection get standstill yesterday as Jamaat-e-Islami hold a rally at Bijoyagar in the capital blocking adjacent streets.

BNP doubts AL's sincerity about reform talks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Expressing doubt over Awami League's (AL) sincerity in the proposed secretaries-general level dialogue, BNP leaders yesterday warned the opposition not to engage in politicking over the talks.

"Come with an open mind to the negotiating table to solve the problems," urged Health Minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain at a public rally at city's Muktangan to observe yesterday as the "Vote Revolution Day". On this day, the BNP led four-party alliance swept the general election five years ago.

Jubo Dal President and Women and Children's Affairs Ministry Adviser Barkatullah Bulu, acting president of Krishak Dal Mojibor Rahman, Sramik Dal Joint Secretary Bakir Hossain, among others, addressed the rally presided over by city BNP President and Mayor Sadek Hossain Khoka.

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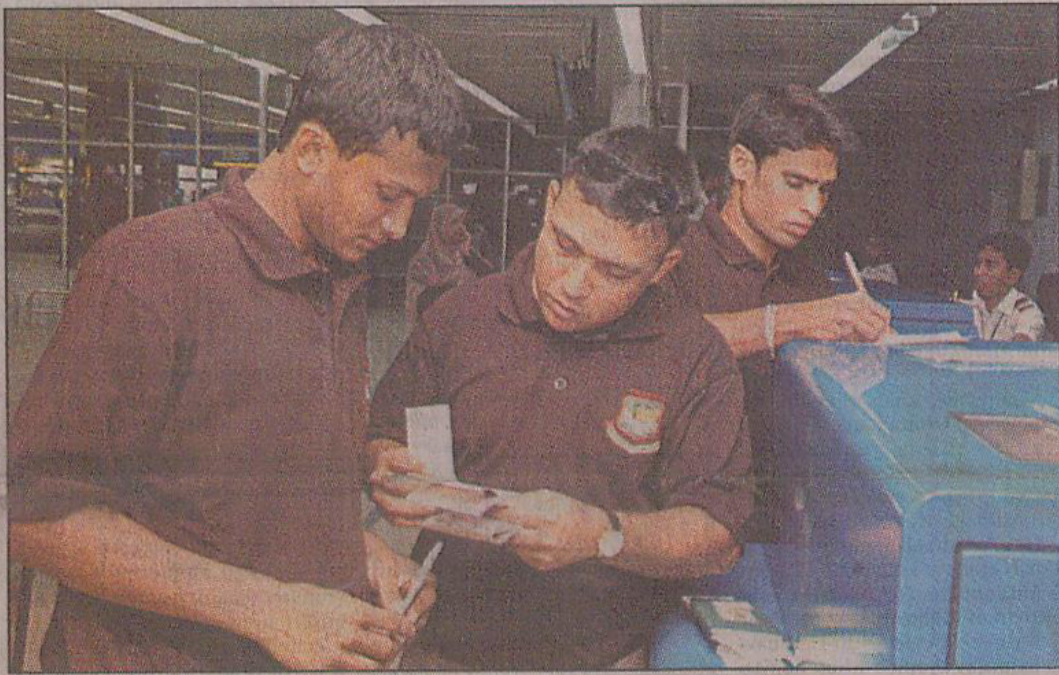


PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh Cricket Team Manager Khaled Mahmud, centre, helps out youngster Sakib Al Hasan, left, with his passport and ticket at Zia International Airport yesterday before departing for New Delhi to play the ICC Champions Trophy.

Hasina spells out 5 musts for polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina yesterday demanded reconstitution of the Election Commission (EC), appointment of a non-partisan person as chief adviser to the caretaker government and using transparent ballot boxes during the upcoming elections.

The Awami League (AL) president reiterated the demands that are parts of its electoral reforms proposal.

Hasina demanded the introduction of digital voter identity cards and a voter list with photographs of the voters. She also demanded the restoration of the previous provisions in the election laws regarding duties of the law enforcers during an election by repealing the provisions introduced during the last caretaker government.

Hasina was speaking at a discussion titled "Election process and the caretaker government reforms in the light of experience" at the Institution of Engineers

Bangladesh in the capital.

Awami League organised the discussion marking October 1, when the BNP-Jamaat coalition swept through the 2001 general elections, as Black Day.

Former cabinet secretary HT Imam presented the keynote speech at the discussion chaired by senior AL presidium member Zillur Rahman.

The AL chief alleged that the BNP-Jamaat coalition took office through massive voter rigging in the

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Rallies bring traffic to standstill

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rallies held by the ruling BNP and its coalition partner Jamaat-e-Islami caused a mess in Dhaka city traffic yesterday.

Both parties occupied busy thoroughfares in the morning near Paltan intersection and the North gate of Baitul Mukarram to celebrate October 1 as 'day of ballot revolution' where hundreds of party activists gathered and brought vehicular movement to a standstill for hours.

The gatherings played havoc with the traffic in central Dhaka by clogging up surrounding road networks of a wide area and the situation worsened in the afternoon while the Traffic Month campaign of the metropolitan police was going on.

"The city's traffic system almost collapsed and the situation was worsened particularly before Iftar

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Bijoya Dashami today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The largest religious festival of Bengali Hindus, Durga Puja, will end today with immersion of Durga idols all over the country including the capital.

The Hindus will also celebrate Bijoya Dashami in the morning according to the lunar calendar.

"All Durga idols from the puja mandaps of the capital will be brought together in Palashi at 3:00pm. A colourful procession will parade through different areas of the city," Jayanta Sen Dipu, president of Mohanagar Sharbojonee Puja Committee, told The Daily Star yesterday.

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Rahman, Bangla Bhai execution stayed

Their letters did not ask for appeal against death penalty

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

Although Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) kingpins Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai in their letters did not seek to appeal against death penalty, the Supreme Court (SC) registrar ordered yesterday to stay their executions considering their letters as prayer for appeal.

The SC registrar accepted the letters of the two militant leaders as appeals through the jail authority in which the militants once again said it is justified to kill people for establishing Islamic rules and that the judges, who held trial under Taguti (non-Islamic) laws neglect-

ing the Shariah, themselves deserve death.

Following the SC registrar's decision, it is now certain that four of the seven JMB militants given death penalty for murdering two judges in Jhalakathi cannot be executed during the tenure of the BNP-led four-party coalition government.

In his letter, Abdur Rahman spoke for armed Jihad to establish the rule of Allah and spread venom against democracy.

Signed by Rahman and Siddiquil Islam Bangla Bhai on Friday, the two letters separately forwarded by the jail authorities reached the SC registrar around 1:00pm yesterday.

SC Registrar Fazlul Karim later sent separate letters to the home ministry, jail and other authorities concerned asking to postpone the execution of the death penalty on Rahman and Bangla Bhai until further orders.

Asked why he considered the letters as appeal when none of the two JMB men asked for so, the SC registrar told The Daily Star, "Since the letters came through the jail authorities who attached their forwarding to the letters, we have accepted those as jail appeal."

He said he passed administrative orders on the authorities concerned, as he had done earlier after

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Harbin blacklisted for installing faulty plant

SHARIER KHAN

For installing a substandard power plant of a very small size and failing to comply with the contract, the Eastern Refinery Limited (ERL) has formally blacklisted the alliance government's favourite Chinese company -- Harbin Power Engineering Company.

The ERL, a subsidiary of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation, incurred huge financial loss through Harbin's installation of a small three-megawatt (MW) steam turbine

power plant under a contract signed during the previous Awami League (AL) government on September 23, 1999.

The alliance government awarded Harbin with the contracts for the 80MW Tongi power plant and 90MW Fenchuganj plant and is set to award the 150MW Chandpur power plant undermining national interest. Besides, opposing consultant's views, the government remains hell-bent on awarding the company the contract for 240MW Siddhirganj power plant -- now

under tender process.

Of these projects, the Tongi plant started operation last year displaying the worst possible engineering and installation work in the country's history.

Harbin lobbyists meanwhile are trying to get the approval of the Cabinet's Purchase Committee for the 150MW Chandpur Power Plant on October 15, sources said. Previously, a government review committee had declared Harbin's bid in the Chandpur project as void

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CEC OUSTER MOVE Aziz silent over possibility of AL-BNP consensus

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz yesterday termed the ongoing process of holding dialogue between the ruling BNP and opposition Awami League (AL) on electoral reforms a good start.

The CEC, however, dodged the question if he would resign if BNP and AL reach a consensus in the dialogue over the opposition combine's demand of reconstitution of Election Commission (EC) by removing Aziz and other election commissioners.

Even up until the last month, Aziz boasted that the next parliamentary election would be held under the present EC. When reporters asked him yesterday if his stand on his previous declaration is changed, he did not comment and left his office for the day.

Meanwhile, the EC has planned to hold dialogues with political parties in November over holding the next parliamentary election.

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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Rotten fish being dried up for sale as dried fish near FDC Road beside railway lines in Tejgaon Industrial Area in the capital.

Govt gives in to traders' pressure against decision to cut power

UNB, Dhaka

The government has backed out of its decision to cut electricity supply to shopping malls during peak hours in the face of tremendous pressure from the shop owners.

The government retracted its earlier orders at a meeting with the leaders of Bangladesh Shop Owners Association (BSOA) and Dhaka City Shop Owners Association (DCSOA) at the power ministry yesterday.

Power Secretary ANH Akhtar Hossain presided over the meeting attended by top officials of PDB, Desa, Desco and REB.

The traders, however, responded to a request of the government to leave out illumination of their malls and keep lighted 50 percent of their essential lights.

The meeting also decided to continue regular load-shedding as part of power rationing instead of four-hour outage.

During the normal times, the government will provide minimum electricity to facilitate the

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Talukder's removal opposes constitution

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The way Major General (ret'd) Anwarul Kabir Talukder was removed from the post of state minister for power on Friday night contradicts the constitution.

With the controversy mounting over whether Talukder resigned willingly or was removed, the law minister yesterday expressed his ignorance over the matter while the Speaker said in parliament the state minister "resigned" from his post.

According to the constitution, the office of a minister shall become vacant "if he resigns from office by placing his resignation in the hands of the Prime Minister for submission to the President".

"The prime minister may at any time request a Minister to resign, and if such Minister fails to comply with the request, may advise the President to terminate the appointment of such Minister," the constitution says.

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