

EC remains silent

FROM PAGE 16 (Shujan), an NGO dedicated to promoting good governance, organised the roundtable in association with the daily Prothom Alo and The Daily Star.

Reduction of Polls Expenditure and Quick Disposal of Election Disputes: Essential Prerequisite for People's Representative Democracy was the topic of the discussion held at the conference room of The Daily Star.

Speaking at the discussion, noted jurist Dr Kamal Hossain said as the Olympic games authorities ban an athlete from participating in any competition if they are tested positive for steroids, the EC should disqualify a candidate for using unfair means in the polls.

He also suggested that the candidates should come up with declarations of net properties at least 30 days before getting nominations so that the EC with the help of independent accountants, investigators and eminent citizens, can scrutinise the documents.

He said the candidates who buy nominations from the parties should be declared ineligible and the parties who encourage such practice should also be outlawed.

Dr Kamal observed that a lawmaker's privilege of not having to appear before courts during parliamentary sessions constitutes a gross abuse. "This law was framed during Ayub Khan's regime when only two sessions would take place in a year. It should be repealed for quick disposal of election disputes," he added.

He said, "The city walls are already covered in graffiti and posters while the intersections and lanes are decorated with colourful posters and hoardings, meaning a good amount of money has already been spent."

He argued that these expenses should be taken as part of the candidates' election expenditure. Criticising the huge flow of cash into electioneering, he said, "All the candidates in Dhaka have already become eligible to be declared ineligible."

Badiul Alam Majumder, secretary general of Shujan, read the keynote paper. In his speech, he said election is a prerequisite for bringing about a representative democracy, but it has to be competitive and conducted on a level playing field.

Citing statistics from the 8th national election, he said, "The lawmakers are reluctant to declare their sources of expenditures and properties and break the laws by giving false statements."

He recommended that declaration of properties and sources of expenditure should be made mandatory for the contenders.

Mentioning the case of Shudhangshu Shekar Haldar vs Chief Election Commissioner and others, he called for the number of High Court benches to be increased. He also sought Supreme Court's intervention for the cases to be disposed of within 90 days.

Justice Naimuddin Ahmed said the judges could dispose of the disputes speedily if they want, but that does not happen when there are loopholes in some of the laws.

Justice Golam Rabbani suggested constituting 300 tribunals with joint divisional judges and senior judges for fast disposal of the cases relating to violation of electoral laws. Candidates will have limited scope to appeal to the higher court in this case, he added.

Justice Abdur Rouf proposed that more polling centres should be set up nearby the voters so that voting can be completed in four hours' time while counting by the end of the election day.

The ballots will then be sent to the returning officers who will re-count those in front of all candidates, he said, adding: "This will ensure checks and balances in the polls."

He also expressed opinion against allowing camps run by the candidates saying that they attempt to influence the voters and create chaos on the election day.

Former adviser to the caretaker government ASM Shahjahan observed that a drastic reduction in electoral expenses could be possible if the politicians are not allowed room for making profit cashing in on their position and power.

"The candidates who would com-

mit electoral offence should be punished immediately under the existing electoral laws," he added.

Major General (retired) Mainul Hossain Chowdhury said criminalization of politics and politicisation of crime have become so rampant that morality is of no value in today's politics.

Bangladesh Economic Association President Professor Kholiquzzaman Ahmad said the countrymen should be made aware of the laws and then work as pressure groups so that the candidates can be held accountable.

Criticising the EC officials for playing a weak role during the election, Secretary General of Jatiya Party (JP-Manzur) Sheikh Shahidul Islam said he prefers implementing the existing election rules rather than framing new ones to rein back the election expenditure.

Referring to excessive use of graffiti, posters and billboards before the election, he said, "The Election Commission officials are usually busy trying to save their jobs instead of watching out for irregular practices by the candidates."

Emphasising on the commitment and will of the political leaders, Shahidul, a former lawmaker, said the political parties should make their leaders follow the party constitutions for a better democracy.

Dhaka University Professor Syed Anwar Hossain said enacting new laws will not help if they are not applied properly.

Like in England where a candidate cannot entertain a voter even with a cup of tea should be applied here too, he suggested.

Hossain, a professor of history, said registration of the political parties, introduction of negative voting system, banning of the political parties who opposed the Liberation War and full declaration of a candidate's income source, qualification and personal particulars should be made compulsory.

Brigadier (retired) Khandker Ibrahim Khaled noted those electoral expenses should be crosschecked against income taxes, and the candidates should be disqualified, if any discrepancy is identified in their declarations.

Brigadier General (retired) Shakhawat Hossain said the constituencies should be made smaller so that people can learn more about the candidates before polls. Besides, a time bar should be set for the government and non-government officials intending to join politics after retirement.

Instead of the present caretaker government system, an interim government headed by the prime minister and assisted by the lawmakers from all the political parties in proportion to their representation in parliament could be formed for the conduct of elections.

Bangladesh Manobandhikar Samannay Parishad President AHM Noman recommended that the candidates of all the parties should be brought to a stage for a public debate before the election.

Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (Fema) President Munira Khan said the caretaker government could also make registration of the political parties mandatory so that the sources of income are made transparent.

The Daily Star Publisher and Editor Mahfuz Anam called on the participants in the discussion to spread the message to the organisations they represent and the grassroots level to create more awareness over the issues.

Former chief news editor of BTV Rafiqul Islam Sarker, journalist Syed Abul Maksud, Democracywatch Executive Director Taleyeh Rehman, among others, spoke at the roundtable.

Anger brews at REB

FROM PAGE 1 months back and completed his Leave Preparatory Retirement (LPR) period and drew all retirement benefits.

His appointment has already created a commotion in the REB as Sheikh Ahmed Ali, who had been serving as the Controller of Finance, was promoted to the position two months back following an appropriate process. His promotion was followed by those of four others of his subordinates.

Earlier, Towhidul Islam was appointed as the REB chairman on contract. His contract expires in December.

In addition, the government is all set to give a one-year contract in advance to Anwarul Kabir Chowdhury, member of Palli Bidyut Samity and Training, who is due to retire next month following the end of the LPR period on November 3.

Sources said that the move to give him contractual appointment in advance was made as the tenure of the current alliance government expires this month and it is unlikely that the caretaker government would renew his contract.

The remaining two posts of member of engineering and member of administration are being held by regular officials.

"When three out of five top posts are run by officials on contract, you can't expect the people in the organisation to work with enthusiasm. There are competent people

within the REB who deserve promotions. It cannot just become a place for retired people enjoying political favouritism," comments an aggrieved official.

Set up in the late seventies, the REB has 1100 employees, with 300 first class officers. Due to bureaucratic tangles caused by the changes in recruitment policy imposed by the alliance government, about 25 posts at the entry level of REB are lying vacant at present.

"Previously the REB recruited its manpower directly with consent from the power ministry. Now the rules demand the REB get clearance from both establishment and power ministries. This has enormously slowed down the recruitment process," said another official.

The REB acts as the lender and coordinator of 70 rural power distribution cooperatives or PBSSs. The REB lends these cooperatives funds to set up power distribution system at 3 per cent interest and subsidises them for the first five years of operation. The REB receives its funds from the donors through the government at a 2 per cent interest rate. The one per cent extra interest it earns through lending support to its overhead expenditure.

12 killed

FROM PAGE 16 hundreds of people had gathered for the celebrations, Rescipo said.

A man carrying a plastic bag went to one of the stalls, set down the bag containing the bomb and bought a bottle of liquor.

After he left, the bomb, which was made of an 81 mm mortar shell, went off, said provincial police chief Superintendent Frederico Dulay.

Confusion reigned at the scene as the wounded were taken to various hospitals in the largely-Christian, agricultural town.

"It was a clear terrorist act," said Dulay although he would go into detail.

Security forces fear the bombings may be related to a massive military offensive being mounted in the southern island of Jolo.

The offensive is aimed at capturing two Indonesian Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) bomb-experts, Dulmatin and Umar Patek, along with their Filipino Muslim extremist hosts, the outlawed Abu Sayyaf group.

Dulmatin and Patek are wanted for their part in the 2002 bombing on the Indonesian resort island of Bali that killed over 200 people, mostly western tourists.

Local military chief Colonel Ruperto Pabustan said the bomb blast may be a diversionary tactic to weaken the offensive against the JI and Abu Sayyaf in Jolo.

It may also be in revenge for the arrest of Dulmatin's wife, Istiada H. Oemar Sovie, in Jolo earlier this month.

"This is the signature of terrorist groups like JI and Abu Sayyaf," he said, citing similarities to past bombings in the area.

"We have intelligence reports that more attacks are planned in Mindanao urban centers."

Australia warned its citizens Tuesday to avoid parts of the Philippines, saying credible reports indicated attacks on places frequented by foreigners remained imminent.

The foreign affairs department, re-issuing a travel warning first given in June, said the threat applied particularly to mainland Mindanao in the south, the Zamboanga Peninsula and the Sulu Archipelago.

Mahmudul's

FROM PAGE 1 Justice Hasan had gone into retirement.

Documents show that if the extension were done in line with the original proposal [of Mahmudul] even a day before Hasan's retirement on January 27, 2004, he [Hasan] would still continue as the chief justice.

Mahmudul in a letter to Law Minister Moudud Ahmed had suggested that the retirement age of the Supreme Court judges should rise to 68 from 65 and of the lower court judges to 60 from 57.

The government, however, had extended only the retirement age of the Supreme Court judges.

Mahmudul had also proposed for appointing a judge to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court on an ad hoc basis for hearing the Bangabandhu Murder Case as the division was only a judge shy of the three-member bench required to hear the case.

But the government did not pay any heed to the proposal, leaving the case pending.

Tigers

FROM PAGE 1 first ever victory against the Caribbeans and complete the full circle of beating all the World Champions.

"I wholeheartedly believe that we can win the match. We have to win it because it is a do-or-die situation if we want to make it to the second round. And the team confidence is high after the performance against Sri Lanka," said Whatmore.

The Sri Lanka-born Australian, however, wants a good start to make their dream come true.

"It is very important to make a good start for a team like us and Zimbabwe. And if we can make a good start then there is a chance to see everything fall in the right place," he added.

West Indies skipper Brian Lara told that Bangladesh have a very positive approach towards the game and he expected a very good and competitive match.

"Bangladesh have showed a lot of improvement recently and beat teams like Australia and Sri Lanka, so there is no chance to take them lightly," said the celebrated left-hander.

"We are also in good shape and made a good start in the competition, so it will be a good cricket match tomorrow," said the world record holder in Tests with the highest individual score of 400 not out.

TEAMS **BANGLADESH:** Habibur Bashar (captain), Shahrir Nafees, Mohammad Ashraf, Aftab Ahmed, Sakib Al Hasan, Forhad Reza, Khaled Mashud, Mohammad Rafique, Abdur Razzak, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Syed Rashed.

WEST INDIES (from): Brian Lara (captain), Ramnaresh Sarwan, Chris Gayle, Dwayne Smith, Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Dwayne Bravo, Wavell Hinds, Marlon Samuels, Carlton Baugh, Fidel Edwards, Ian Bradshaw, Coreo Collymore, Runako Morton and Jerome Taylor.

AL, BNP 'very close'

FROM PAGE 1 Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, the two leaders expressed hopes to reach a consensus on the disputes over the chief of the next caretaker government and other issues.

They will resume the talks on October 16 morning.

"We are trying to meet the nation's expectation...We have come very closer on many points [of the electoral reform proposals]," Jaiil, also coordinator of the 14-party opposition combine, said emerging from the meeting.

Bhuiyan also said, "The discussions have reached a stage where we need to go to our respective parties and alliances to take decision. I hope we will be successful."

From the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban Jaiil rushed to the residence of party chief Sheikh Hasina and informed her of the outcome of yesterday's negotiation.

Sources present at the AL chief's residence said at the beginning of yesterday's talks Jaiil wanted to know the response of the ruling BNP about his demand for appointing someone else instead of "highly political" Justice KM Hasan as the chief of the caretaker government.

Bhuiyan told Jaiil that he will discuss the issue in the forum of his party and alliance. It will need time to reach a decision as some within the party and alliance hold positive views and others negative about the disputes on the reform proposals, Bhuiyan said.

Jaiil said Bhuiyan again urged him to compromise on one of the two major issues—Justice Hasan and the incumbent chief election commissioner (CEC). "But I rejected and argued that there is no scope for any compromise on these two vital issues as Justice Hasan is highly political and the CEC has proved himself disqualified. A free and fair election is not possible under their supervision," Jaiil told Hasina.

In a dramatic move, Bhuiyan proposed Jaiil for reconstitution of the Election Commission through removing CEC MAAziz. "Accept this proposal first. We do not have any problem to meet your demand for removal of the chief election com-

missioner," Jaiil quoted Bhuiyan as telling him at the dialogue.

"But I argued that the issue of Justice KM Hasan must be resolved first," Jaiil told Hasina.

The AL-led alliance wants a solution to the disputes on October 16 when the two secretaries general sit next as Justice Hasan is supposed to be the chief of the next caretaker government following expiry of the present government's tenure on October 27.

The 14-party opposition, which remains rigid on its stance that they neither will contest nor allow any election under Justice Hasan, is preparing to launch vigorous agitation to press home their demands.

Both Bhuiyan and Jaiil told journalists at the press briefing that the discussion was held in a cordial atmosphere and that they discussed all the issues. The talks will be continued, they said.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia along with her entire family will leave Dhaka for Saudi Arabia on October 14 to perform Umrah while opposition leader Sheikh Hasina is supposed to leave Dhaka tomorrow for USA to visit her son and daughter-in-law.

Jaiil also leaves Dhaka for Singapore today for medical a check-up.

On the first day of the dialogue on October 5, Jaiil placed the 14-party opposition's 31-point proposal for electoral reforms to Bhuiyan asking the ruling party to resolve the issue of appointment of the chief adviser first.

The next day, both the leaders claimed that the discussion progressed a bit towards resolving several demands relating to the reform proposals.

On the third day of the dialogue on October 8, the two leaders hoped that they would be able to reach a consensus to resolve the disputes over electoral reforms.

Siddhirganj 240MW

FROM PAGE 1 Siddhirganj project's implementer Electricity Generation Company Ltd (EGCB) on September 26 announced that Harbin's bid is invalid as the company refused to extend the validity of its bid and bid security submitted in January. Harbin did so to avoid scrutiny of its flawed financial offer by the ADB.

The project's Swiss consultant Kema in June found Harbin's bid financially non-responsive. Kema also found that Harbin resorted to cheating in its price offer, deliberately hiding quotation of actual equipment to show a low price. The consultant recommended that the EGCB should negotiate with Bhel since it is the lowest responsive bidder.

Harbin, in line with its previous bidding techniques, then came up with a so-called low price offer of \$90 million while Bhel's offer was \$110 million. But after three months of scrutiny, Kema found out that Harbin's actual price offer is \$114 million and Bhel's \$113 million.

Initially, Harbin showed its low price offer by hiding costs of spares and other machinery, a trick it used to become the lowest bidder for Tongi, Chandpur and Fenchuganj power projects. There had been allegations of corruption and favouritism in awarding contracts for these projects to Harbin.

The EGCB last year floated the tender for two 120 MW units of the peaking power plant in Siddhirganj, in which only Harbin and Bhel participated. The ADB is providing \$77 million loan and gave a guideline for implementation of the project. The ADB loan for the project is part of a several hundred million dollar loan for Bangladesh's power sector.

The EGCB appointed famous Swiss company Kema earlier this year to evaluate only the financial offers. As per the ADB guideline for the tender, Kema calculated the total value of Harbin's bid by taking price reference of Bhel for spares, which the Chinese company did not mention. The ADB guideline however says that after adding the missing prices, if the price ultimately becomes more than 15 percent higher than the initially quoted price, then that bid should be considered non-responsive.

"So, initially Harbin quoted 90 million dollars. The ultimate price turned out to be 114 million dollars, which is more than 15 percent higher. This implies that the bidder has grossly manipulated its bid and that Harbin did not mistakenly forget to quote prices of some spares," a source pointed out.

Despite Kema's recommendations, the EGCB strangely remained bent on awarding the contract to Harbin. But at this point, the ADB stood in the EGCB's way. As per the loan agreement between the ADB and the government, the EGCB must have its bid cleared by the ADB.

When the EGCB sought clearance, the ADB in July wanted to know twice how the EGCB came to the conclusion that Harbin is the lowest bidder. Despite repeated reminders, the EGCB did not answer this question, and thus wasted several months.

The Siddhirganj plant site, located near the Sitalakhyia river, now accommodates another 210 MW unit on a 30-acre area. This site was chosen for

the peaking plant because of available space and better gas supply facility. A peaking plant is one that generates power during the peak demand hours and such plants are generally made of 'simple cycle' generators in which gas consumption is very high. Once the contract is awarded, the plant will take 17 months to come into operation.

The ADB late last year lodged a complaint with the Chinese government regarding the corruption of Harbin in Bangladesh.

Harbin was blacklisted by the Eastern Refinery Limited (ERL) in August for failing to install a 3 MW plant as per the contract and causing huge losses to the ERL.

An analysis of the draft contract for the recently cancelled 150 MW Chandpur power project shows that the Harbin contract contains hundreds of legal loopholes and hidden costs of \$15.56 million. The contract documents dropped out 4,448 spare parts of 476 categories from Harbin's original offer. Investigation into the dysfunctional Tongi plant built by Harbin also exposed that the company dropped out thousands of spares of various categories.

BGMEA threatens

FROM PAGE 1 deployment of law enforcement agencies including Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), Bangladesh Rifles and if necessary, the army, to bring the situation under control.

Hoque also named four persons -- Mosharaff Hossain Mishu, Advocate Mahbubur Rahman Ismail, Bahrane Sultan and Master Moklesur Rahman and termed them as conspirators saying that they led the destruction in collaboration with foreign agencies.

These people along with some others in three to four microbuses went to different factories and urged the workers to come out for demonstrations and in some areas, they forcibly brought out the workers for carrying out the destruction, the BGMEA president alleged.

"The government should investigate where they get the funds and who guide them to destruction," Hoque said adding "they are trying to destroy the faith of buyers to shift the \$8 billion export industry elsewhere from Bangladesh."

At least seven factories were vandalised completely with some 100 factories partially damaged at Mirpur, Pallabi, Shamoli, Kafur and Uttara, he said adding that the miscreants also looted machinery and documents from these factories.

Hoque also questioned about the role of the law enforcers saying that at some areas, they did nothing but to keep watching the daylong destruction. He, however, lauded their activities at Gazipur, Savar, Narayanganj, Jirabo, Mailbagh and Old Dhaka where the angry workers could not stage any destruction.

PM on project

FROM PAGE 1 Meanwhile, the prime minister is expected to visit three districts of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) -- Rangamati, Khagrachhari and Bandarban --today and open a number of development projects at the district headquarters.

This will be her first visit to the hill districts after assuming power in October 2001.

In Rangpur, after attending a darbar at the local army cantonment, the prime minister inaugurated district Judge's Court Bhaban. The court building has been constructed spending Tk 3.30 crore.

She also laid the foundation of Rangpur Collectorate Bhaban.

Our Dinajpur correspondent reported that the prime minister inaugurated nine out of 13 development projects during her visit to the district, but none of them are fully completed.

District administration sources said the prime minister inaugurated 250-bed Dinajpur Medical College Hospital (First phase of 500 Beds Hospital), Dinajpur Collectorate Building, 100-Bed Zia Heart Foundation and Research Center, Women Handicraft and Agro-based Training Center, Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Board, Dinajpur Deaf and Dump Institute, Mozammel Haque Institute of Kidney Disease and Research Center, Dinajpur Chapter of BKSP and Tayaba Majumdar Blood Bank.

Our Khagrachhari correspondents quoted the district administration sources as saying the prime minister will land at the local helipad in the morning and then open a 200-metre long Second Chenghi Bridge, Vocational Training Institute, Youth Development Training Centre and a Parjatan motel.

At noon, the prime minister is expected to address a public rally at Khagrachhari Stadium.

In Rangamati, Santu Larma, chairman of CHT Regional Council and the president of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), and three circle chiefs--Devashish Roy (Chakma Circle), Augsuipru Chowdhury (Bomang Circle) and Pilahpru Chowdhury (Mong Circle)--will call on the prime minister at Rangamati Circuit House, sources said.

Later, the prime minister will open Youth Training Centre, Agriculture Training Institute and the newly built office of the district police superintendent.

She will also address at a public meeting at Rangamati Stadium.

In Bandarban, the prime minister will inaugurate Tribal Council Institute, Shankha Bridge, Meghla Parjatan Motel and Technical Training Institute.

Saarc

FROM PAGE 16 and injuring 200,000.

The proposal to set up the disaster management centre was approved at the Saarc Summit held in Dhaka in November last year.

Besides Saarc members Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives, Afghanistan will also become part of this institution after it formally joins the regional forum in March next year.

Moudud says

FROM PAGE 1 Moudud gave the clarification against the backdrop of opposition allegation that the government made the constitutional amendment in a bid to make its chosen man former chief justice KM Hasan, once a BNP office bearer, chief adviser of the next caretaker government.

Refuting the allegation, State Minister for Law Shahjahan Omar said, "The government has done it only to get the services of senior and experienced judges in dispensation of justice."

On separation of the judiciary, Moudud said, "It needs only an amendment to the provision of the CrPC (Criminal Procedure Code) to separate magistracy from the executive, which is now pending with parliament."

He went on, "The judiciary could not be separated completely as sessions of the eighth parliament ended. The next government can pass the necessary bill in the first or second session of next parliament."

The minister became annoyed when asked why the bill styled Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill, 2006, which concerned separation of the judiciary, gathered dust in parliament for over six months.

"You go and remove the dust," he told the reporter.

Moudud declined to call the Indemnity Act a black law, saying, "We did not frame any black law."

As in other countries, the Act exempted members of the armed forces from the purview of civil courts and not from that of military courts, he added.

Fifty-six people were killed and hundreds crippled during "Operation Clean Heart."

Explaining why the government failed to form Human Rights Commission, Moudud said, "We tried to form the commission and it was at its final stage. But it could not be formed due to some reasons."

On appointing an ombudsman, the minister said the proposed bill lies with the cabinet committee for its consideration.

Replying to a query on ineffectiveness of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), he said, "It was our duty to formulate the law for the commission, which we did. It is now up to them to perform."

Asked why the government did not make provisions for direct election to the reserved seats, as demanded by women's organisations, the minister said, "We made the law after discussing with these organisations."

He added, "It does not matter who are now opposing the new law as the civil society does not represent the people."

Hasina terms

FROM PAGE 1 her written speech.

She also defended the opposition's proposals for reforms in the caretaker government system, the Election Commission and electoral laws to ensure a free and fair election.

Prior to Hasina's speech, the AL showed a documentary portraying the anarchical five-year rule of the BNP-led alliance marked by grenade attack on August 21, repression of the minority, women and children, political killings and tortures, extra-judicial killings, attacks on teachers, intellectuals and journalists, anarchy in the education sector, rise of militancy, price hike of essentials, wide-scale corruption by Hawa Bhaban, severe power crisis, and killings at Phulbari and Kansat.

MAJOR PLEDGES Hasina's apparent election pledges are:

To bring the price of essentials down to commoners' purchasing capability, a "Price Control Authority" will be set up and markets will be monitored.

Power deficit will be brought to a tolerable level by taking adequate measures to generate sufficient power.

Militancy and criminal activities will be curbed, criminals and godfathers will be detected and brought to justice, political and administrative patronisations to criminals will be stopped.

Corruption will be uprooted from all levels of the state and society, exemplary punitive actions will be taken against the corrupt and their assets will be forfeited and the independence and effectiveness of the Anti-Corruption Commission will be ensured.

Separation of the judiciary from the executive will be ensured within a short period and its independence and neutrality will be ensured.