

## 14-PARTY ULTIMATUM President to meet reasonable demands

### Hopes Nizami

UNB, Dhaka

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Matiur Rahman Nizami yesterday said it is the President's discretion whether or not to call out army to quell any future outbreaks of political violence.

"It is the discretion of the President," he told members of the Overseas Correspondents Association Bangladesh (OCAB) at a press briefing at Jamaat central office, responding to a question about army intervention in case of fresh political agitation.

Nizami wouldn't comment on

Awami League-led 14-party combine's November-3 ultimatum for the caretaker government to implement their 11-point demand for ensuring free and fair elections.

"We think the President would meet reasonable demands, but the elections cannot be pushed towards uncertainty by raising illogical demands," he told a correspondent.

He blamed the Awami League and its allies for targeting and killing as many as 13 Jamaat-Shibir members during the siege programme in Dhaka on October 28.

He disagreed with the notion of mass uprising staged October 27-29 against the alliance rule and said: "It was a demonstration of AL terrors." He said people would give the reply by ballot in the coming polls.

Asked if Jamaat felt insecure and sought special protection from the President, Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid said: "We are not scared about our security, but party chief and important persons should be given protection under the rule."

Mohammad Qamaruzzaman, Kader Mollah and ATM Azharul Islam were present.

## Non-govt teachers, staffs to get 100 pc salary

### Says govt circular

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The teachers and employees of the non-government schools, colleges, madrasas and technical educational institutions will get 100 per cent salary from the national exchequer, an education ministry circular said yesterday.

Of the 10 per cent salary hike, 5 per cent will be given from July 2006 from the budget of 2006-07 and the rest 5 per cent will be given as 'outstanding bill' from the budget of 2007-08, says the circular.

The circular asked the educational institutions under MPO to formulate a policy to submit their incomes by three months.

BNP leaning teachers association Shikkok Karmachari Oikya Jote President Selim Bhuiya termed it the victory of the association while National Front for Teachers and Employees (NFTE) said the notification is vague. NFTE said the education ministry is still bearing the legacy of the four-party coalition.

Kazi Faruq Ahmed, NFTE coordinator, said, "We have talked about the issue time and again and there was a directive during the immediate past government that we do not have to submit income of the institutions under MPO to the national exchequer."

## Police raid 5 DU halls

DU CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday raided five dormitories of Dhaka University (DU) and arrested two outsiders.

The raided halls are Sir AF Rahman Hall, Jagannath Hall, Sergeant Jahurul Haque Hall, Haji Muhammad Muhsin Hall and Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Hall.

The detainees are Tanvir Ahmed, who lived at Jagannath Hall with a pseudonym - Loknath and KM Farhad, detained from F Rahman Hall. However, they were later released.

Sources said in the pre-dawn raid, police searched a number of rooms but found no arms. While talking to newsmen, some residents of these dorms alleged that police only searched those rooms where Bangladesh Chhatra League workers reside.

However, a small bomb was recovered from Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall yesterday noon. Bomb experts of police, on information, recovered the bomb.

## ADVISERS' FIRST DAY AT OFFICE



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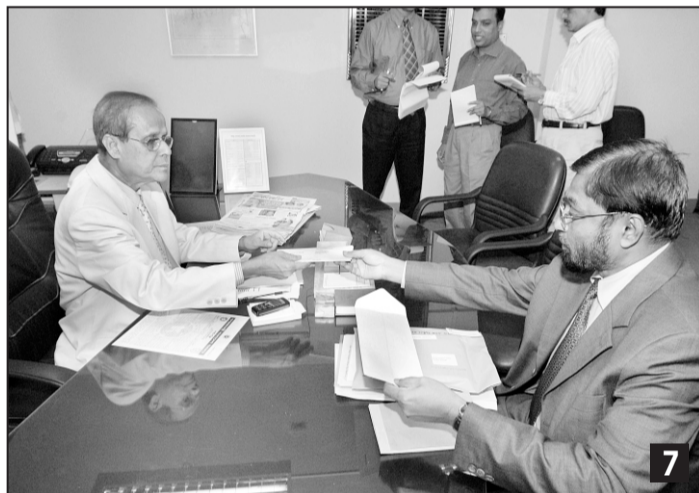
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The advisers to the caretaker government attended their offices at the Secretariat yesterday and met the officials. 1) Adviser Justice Fazlul Huq, 2) Adviser CM Shafi Sami, 3) Adviser Dr Akbar Ali Khan, 4) Adviser M Azizul Huq, 5) Adviser Hasan Mashud Chowdhury, 6) Adviser Sultana Kamal, 7) Adviser Mahbul Alam, 8) Adviser Prof Sufia Rahman and 9) Adviser Dhiraj Kumar Nath.

PHOTO: STAR

## WEATHER TODAY

### No change in temperature likely

UNB, Dhaka

Light rain or drizzle is likely at one or two places over all the divisions in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Night temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country during the period, Met Office said.

Highest temperature 34.3 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Chittagong and Sitakunda and lowest 20.1 degree Celsius at Sitakunda.

The sun sets in the capital at 5.18pm today and rises at 6:06am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature		Humidity in in celsius	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	31.5	22.3	82	77
Chittagong	34.3	24.0	64	67
Rajshahi	29.8	22.3	79	79
Khulna	32.0	22.2	83	83
Barisal	32.7	21.3	75	87
Sylhet	32.5	21.9	78	75
Cox's Bazar	34.0	25.0	76	71

## Meet demands or face all-out movements

FROM PAGE 1

organised by the 14-party's Dhaka city unit, the alliance issued the same threat to lajuddin.

"We'll declare vigorous movements at tomorrow's [today's] rally if the caretaker government failed to meet our deadline," AL presidium member Amu told a preparatory meeting at the AL's central office on Bangabandhu Avenue yesterday.

Another 14-party delegation led by AL President Sheikh Hasina on October 30 met the caretaker chief and handed him over the 11-point "immediate" task to carry out today.

The 14-party is pressing hard the president to bring drastic changes to both the civil and police administration since he was sworn in as the chief adviser on October 29.

Briefing the journalists, Jalil, also 14-party coordinator, said he has asked the president to meet their charter of demands. The demands also include restructuring of the Election Commission.

"We have made it clear that the recent administrative reshuffle is not enough and all contractual appointments must be cancelled to hold a free and fair election," Jalil said. He added that a large number of political appointments during previous government's tenure have not yet been cancelled.

The establishment, law and home secretaries are still in their posts, he said, alleging that all appointments in the president's office are also controversial and they have still contacts with the BNP-Jamaat alliance.

"All controversial and contractual appointments can be cancelled by a single notice," Jalil argued. He said the ambassador and high commissioner to the US and the UK were appointed on contracts by the BNP-Jamaat and these would have to be cancelled.

He said they also told the president to change all the managing and governing bodies of all government offices, banks, schools, colleges and other organisations.

"We have also told him to issue a declaration through the media to put down the portrait of former prime minister Khleda Zia," he said.

The chief adviser assured them of taking all necessary measures to hold a free and fair election, he added.

The AL leader reacted sharply over BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan's comments that he has not heard about the demand of restructuring of the EC.

He said Bhuiyan proposed to him repeatedly to remove MA Aziz and reconstitute the EC if the 14-party accepted Justice KM Hasan as the head of the caretaker government.

Accusing Bhuiyan of "blatantly lying", Jalil said it is not the AL rather the BNP that has been conspiring to foil the upcoming elections.

He also accused the BNP of threatening lajuddin to follow their directions. The 14-party coordinator vowed to resist any "blue-print" election in the country.

At yesterday's preparatory meeting, AL leader Amu observed a congenial atmosphere for the fair polls is yet to be

## Obituary



AKM Abdur Razzak, former superintendent of police and founder of Razzak Securities Ltd, passed away due to old age complications

at Mohakhali Chest Disease hospital in the city on Wednesday at the age of 85, says a press release.

Razzak, also a member of Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), left behind his four sons and one daughter.

He was buried at Sahjahanpur graveyard.

A milad mahfil will be held at DSE on November 6 at 4:00pm to pray for salvation of the departed soul.

## Chehlum

Chehlum of freedom fighter Dr Aftab Ahmad, a professor at the Department of Political Science of Dhaka University, will be held today after Asr prayers at his residence at 19/G Fuller Road in the city, says a press release.

## Pricey essentials remained people's permanent plight

FROM PAGE 1

The situation deteriorated further during Altaf's term. In the face of severe criticism both from the public and the ruling parties, the government again on April 25 this year stripped Altaf of the portfolio.

Another fact that went against Altaf was his failure to properly deal with some key international trade issues. He was also blamed for his failure to protect the country's interest efficiently at international level, especially during the WTO meet in Hong Kong.

Whatever steps taken under Khosru did not bring any positive results later as Altaf lacked necessary capability to lead complex trade issues. Meanwhile, other regional countries had reaped benefits from the changed situation due mainly to their prompt actions.

Altaf was made a minister without portfolio and the then water resources minister Hafiz Uddin Ahmad was given the additional responsibility to look after the commerce ministry. The then adviser to the commerce ministry Barkat Ullah Bulu was also removed and made adviser to the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs.

These changes had been attributed to the staggering failure of Altaf and advise Bulu to rein in the price spiral. The removal came at a time when cross-section of people are highly dissatisfied with the government's performance as prices of some essentials including sugar and edible oil hit record high.

There were allegations Altaf and Bulu were serving the interests of the syndicates involved in controlling the market as well as prices of certain essentials.

Awami League (AL) lawmakers Shahjahan Khan and Mirza Azam alleged in parliament on May 3 that "syndicate of ruling alliance men" hiked sugar's price. They demanded an investigation into this and punishment to the culprits.

Responding to the allegations, Hafiz said, "We have come to know about the syndicates through newspapers. It will be investigated and necessary measures will be taken."

Initially, Altaf was stubbornly denying the skyrocketing prices of any essentials. The government-run Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) reported several times of a substantial price hike of essentials in a short span of time.

But the ministry meetings chaired by Altaf often found the price situation not as "exorbitant as reflected in the media".

He also blamed the media for its negative role in highlighting skyrocketing prices of essentials.

However, even the most obstinate marshals have to give in to reality at some point. So did Altaf, admitting at last that his ministry did not have the tools required to contain the soaring prices.

He however said, in an obvious attempt to excuse his office, "We do sit at inter-ministerial meetings to build coordination among the agencies concerned. But, as different market regulating agencies lie to different ministries, it often hampers our coordination measures."

So far so good, but the press was amazed when, in a childish contradiction to his own foregoing statements, Altaf "dutifully" added the refrain that the four-party alliance government was "quite successful" in reining in the prices of essentials.

Many still believe the removed ministers are just scapegoats, the situation continued worsening day by day. Stripping Altaf of his portfolio might be a government strategy to earn easy popularity as the general election nears.

**MESS IN TACKLING ESSENTIAL PRICES**

The commerce ministry sat with representatives of different ministries, departments and other government agencies three to four months before the Ramadan every year. The objective was to ensure that all could play their due role in tackling rising essentials' prices. But the meetings failed to gain success, though it was not a seasonal issue.

There were differences between the commerce and the finance ministries regarding duty cut on some of items. When the commerce ministry made recommendations to reduce duty on a particular item, it was the finance ministry that had the final authority to execute those.

There are examples that commerce forwarded a duty-cut proposal in time but finance took decision much later. As a result, price of that particular item had already shot up unusually by that time.

The principal secretary to the prime minister at a meeting on September 3 this year asked the finance ministry to bring down taxes on 11 essential items, which are heavily consumed during Ramadan, to zero level. The commerce ministry sent a letter to the finance ministry with necessary recommendations the next day.

But then finance minister M Saifur Rahman strongly opposed the move, saying reducing tax is not the proper way to control prices of essentials.

However, India and Pakistan took different measures including cutting taxes and providing subsidies on importing some essential

commodities as prices of those items went up sharply in the global market.

India reduced import tax on edible oil by 90 percent on August 11 and its price came down immediately. India imports four million tonnes of edible oil every year. Pakistan provided subsidy to gram importers this year as its price shot up sharply in international market in the wake of poor global output.

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), which looks after security on the border, unofficially opened 20 different key border points so that rice, pulse, gram, onion, sugar and other essentials could easily be smuggled into the country. The move was to help bring the commodities' prices at a tolerable level. Sources said the BDR did it after receiving green signal from the very top level.

For the first time, the government involved the BDR in buying these essentials from bordering areas and selling them in the retail outlets in Dhaka. The government was apparently desperate not to allow the essentials' prices go beyond tolerable level during Ramadan as its tenure was set to expire on October 27 and the elections were due in January next year.

**FAILED TCB DRIVE**

After his takeover, Khosru kept the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) dormant, encouraging the private sector. But Altaf engaged it again in import and sales of essential commodities, expressly to check the price spiral in 2005.

The state-owned trading agency again imported a good quantity of onions, grams, sugar and pulse ahead of Ramadan to keep their prices under control during the month of fasting.

But a mass of irregularities has rendered the move a failure and the consumers have not seen any positive impact of it on the soaring essentials' prices during Ramadan.

There was a different position on the TCB not only within the commerce ministry but also within the policymakers. Saifur Rahman felt that engaging the TCB to import and sell was 'dangerous'. As the private sector imports between 90 percent to 95 percent of the essential commodities, allowing the TCB might leave a negative impact on it.

"When the TCB imports, private sector is discouraged and stops imports that can create an unstable situation," Saifur explained.

On the other hand, Hafiz Uddin thinks the TCB should be kept out of the government rules and regulations so that it can import within short notice and respond to the

market situation quickly.

Involving the BDR in open market sale this year has added a new dimension, but making essentials' prices tolerable for the mid and low-income group remains a far cry.

**PLANNED WATCHDOGS PUT ON ICE**

Khosru took steps to establish two new market regulators -- a 'consumer bureau' for monitoring domestic market and a 'consumer council' for protecting consumers' interests. These were supposed to start functioning by 2004 to help the government control the market of essential goods.

He left behind the draft documents for the twin regulators ready to be tabled before the cabinet, but Altaf could not make any visible progress further. His successor also failed to push ahead with the proposed "consumer rights protection act" lying for long with the law ministry for vetting.

Hafiz Uddin viewed his position "As I am here for the last couple of months, let things go as they are."

**THOUGHTLESS NEGLECT OF TRADE THINK-TANK**

The commerce minister's lack of leadership skill has clearly been demonstrated in the case of Bangladesh Foreign Trade Institute (BFTI), which Altaf headed as the chair of its board of governors.

The BFTI came into being in 2003 with an aim to fortify the country's international trade and investment capacity. It was meant to act as a think-tank, do research on trade issues and prepare position papers for Bangladesh on bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations, particularly at the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

But the institute has not been able to make any notable contribution to any of those fields due to a shocking dearth of manpower and finance that Altaf has done nothing to address or assuage. He has simply failed to lead and mould the newly established body into a definite shape.

Although the BFTI memorandum of articles allots it a 28-strong staff, it has been running since inception with a skeleton three-member staff comprising a junior administrative-cum-finance officer, a computer operator and a messenger.

There has not been any visible change after Hafiz was made commerce minister.

**EXPORT DIVERSIFICATION REMAINS A FAR CRY**

No significant progress has been made in diversifying the country's export basket and markets, though Bangladesh has been able to increase its export income by more

than \$1 billion in the 2004-05 financial year and over \$2 billion in the last fiscal year, thanks solely to the burgeoning apparel sector and resilience of the private sector performing against all sorts of unfavourable business environment.

With a single sector, readymade garments, accounting for around 75 percent of its export proceeds, the degree of vulnerability of the country's export sector remains very high. The risk is so high also because the buyers, particularly from the US and the European Union, have been increasingly raising different compliance issues, prompting the country's leading exporters apprehend that the RMG sector is going to see a bad time ahead.

Exporters said most of the commercial counsellors at Bangladesh missions abroad have been appointed on political considerations and typically are not trained on how to promote the country's exports to prospective buyers. The commerce minister also failed to chalk out any specific plans for promoting Bangladesh's products in the global market.

However, the ministry during Khosru's tenure took a decision to call back some of the under-performing commercial counsellors. But it had to shelve the decision bowing to political pressures.

No action has so far been taken against any poorly performing counsellors, although almost half the 46 missions have been failing to achieve their export targets.

## Death anniversary



Today is the 3rd death anniversary of Mesbah Uddin Sabu, a freedom fighter and sports organiser, says a press release.

On the occasion, Muktijoddha Mesbah Uddin Sabu Smriti Sangsad, Jatiyatabadi Muktijoddha Dal and Jatiyatabadi Muktijuddher Projonma have chalked out elaborate programmes, including milad mahfil, offering prayers at his grave and food distribution to the destitute.

Besides, a doa mahfil will also be held at his 54/4, Dhakhhin Mukhdapara after Asr prayers.

Family members of Sabu have requested all to attend the programmes to pray for salvation of the departed soul.