

4-party ready

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Khandaker Mosharrif Hossain and Khondkar Delwar Hossain. They had a two-hour long meeting with the CA.

AL Chief Sheikh Hasina entered Bangabhaban at 10:15pm accompanied by senior leaders of 14-party coalition and the meeting was under way at the time of filing of this report.

Sources in 14-party coalition hinted that their leader would urge the CA to create a congenial atmosphere for holding a free and fair election through realising their electoral demands. Hasina would also protest the recent appointments of two new election commissioners who are, in their words, 'partisan', according to the sources.

"We will reiterate our demands that had been placed to the president and chief adviser earlier," Saber Hossain Chowdhury, political secretary to the AL chief, told The Daily Star before the meeting between Iajuddin and Hasina.

Iajuddin, who had assumed the office of chief adviser to the caretaker government on October 29 triggering a constitutional debate, failed to create a level playing field for the next election, rather steps taken by him like making decisions unilaterally, appointments of two controversial persons as new election commissioners and the sudden announcement of the election schedule deepened the political crisis.

Iajuddin's unilateral moves and decisions however were in line with the demands of BNP-led four-party alliance while most of the demands of 14-party remained unrealised.

In the wake of the prevailing situation, advisers to the caretaker government started expressing their frustration over the ongoing political deadlock and pressures at home and from abroad on the president and CA were mounting for initiating steps to resolve the crisis.

Amid such a situation, the president and CA on last Wednesday sought to initiate dialogues with the two major political alliances led by AL and BNP. He sent his adviser Mokhlesur Rahman to AL President Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia to discuss differing burning issues, including the possibility of rescheduling the election date.

IAJUDDIN'S CULPABILITY?
Since Iajuddin assumed the office of chief adviser to the caretaker government on October 29, he has been mired in controversies

due to his unilateral decisions and dubious moves that rather deepened the political crisis.

Some of his moves, in an amazing coincidence, matched the demands of BNP-led four-party alliance that had elected him the president during the immediate past parliament's tenure.

The chief adviser had unilaterally decided to deploy the army keeping all the advisers in the dark, but in the face of severe criticisms he later retracted the decision. He termed the form of the current caretaker government as a 'presidential form of government'. He did not consult with the advisers before appointing the two new election commissioners, diminishing the hope of a solution to the crisis surrounding reconstitution of the EC.

He reportedly made the EC announce the election schedule hurriedly limiting the scope of reshuffling the administration.

He made himself the chiefs of two advisory committees on administrative affairs and law and order although he is in charge of the two ministries --- establishment and home affairs.

Seething with frustration with the way the chief adviser had been taking his decisions unilaterally and treating the advisers with a distant interest, five advisers on November 23 refrained from attending their offices.

Baghdad

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Earlier a truck driving at high speed slammed into a bus stop in a town south of Baghdad yesterday, killing about 20 people and wounding 15, police said.

The truck hit a group of Iraqis in Al-Wahada, 35km south of Baghdad, as they were waiting for buses to the capital, said police Lt. Muhammed Al-Shemari.

He said it didn't appear to be an accident because the truck, an empty fuel tanker, didn't have a flat tire or any other obvious mechanical problems that would have caused the crash.

It was not immediately clear if the driver had survived, Al-Shemari said.

Scores of people are killed each week in Iraq by roadside bombs and car bombs, many of which are driven by suicide attackers. But there have been few reports of attacks during which a driver has ploughed into a crowd in a vehicle without explosives hidden inside.

(AFP, AP)

1.22cr false names

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Society of the country cooperate in the process, Lippert said.

Terminating the list "only one important part" of the election process, the NDI chief in Bangladesh said responsibility for a credible election lies not only with the Election Commission, but also with the caretaker government, public administration, political parties and ultimately the citizens.

The supplement list of new voters often did not match the existing voter list, Lippert said. Suggesting double checking, he said, "Improved matching of supplemental and existing voter lists will reduce the possibility of confusion on election day."

NDI Project Manager Najia Khogyani-Hashemee identified migration, incorrect registration, death, and registering names of unknown or under-age persons as the reasons for excess names in the electoral roll.

She said rural centres are more prone to error and Rajshahi region has the highest level of error.

According to the NDI report, duplications are the result of registering names of the same persons at two places while names were missed because of the voters' not being present at the time of registration or intimidation or deliberate dropping.

NDI Senior Consultant Dr Mohammed Yusuf and Communications Consultant Shadia Syed were present at the press conference.

In his reaction to the report, Awami League (AL) leader Saber Hossain Chowdhury said the AL has been alleging that 1.4 crore voters in the updated voter list are fake and the NDI report has almost proved it.

The additional ballot papers for these excess voters are more likely to be abused in the election, he said.

Former foreign affairs adviser Reaz Rahman said the mistakes in the updated voter list are "inherited." It should be checked if the mistakes are natural, he told journalists.

5 envoys

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"It's private conversation," the British high commissioner told reporters without elaborating on what actually transpired.

Abdul Jaill said he has apprised the diplomats of Awami League's views about the elections, which they want to be free and fair through requisite reforms.

Six die

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bound passenger launch from Sunamganj at around 1:00am.

On information, divers of the Fire Brigade rushed to the spot, about 60-km from Netrokona town, and recovered the six bodies until yesterday noon. Search for the missing passengers is going on.

Polls observers

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In 2001 elections they decided to carry out election observation activities. After proper scrutiny, 365 observers were chosen for the work in 13 districts, but questions rose about their ability to perform the task.

"We had to strive...you know, but at last we got the permission. I had Basont Rani, Joychand Karmakar, Ujjala Banik and a number of Dhaka University MA degree holders," said ADD Programme Development Officer Tamjeeda Jannati.

"During the elections, response from the administration was unprecedented, and we achieved the satisfaction through our efficiency," Tamjeeda added.

Later in 2003, 80 physically challenged people participated in the union parishad elections and 16 won.

This time the workshops with physically challenged election observers focus on election-related violence and accountability of the nomination seekers. Sabina Parveen, civil rights promoter of the ADD, said explaining the programmes for observers of the election.

The participants take training on how to deal with the incidence of violence during elections. Besides, they are going to organise programmes where the nomination seekers have to place their pledges.

Their election observation activities started with Dhaka-2 constituency.

"The people with disability lead a neglected life with deep grievances. Participating at the most significant event of the nation is like having the heaven in hands for them," ADD President Mosharrif Hossain said.

Khaleda

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uncertainty through destructive politics," she told a joining function at her Hawa Bhaban office at Banani yesterday.

Kazi Anwar Hossain, former MP of BJP (Najur) from Nabinagar constituency in Brahmanbaria, formally joined the BNP.

Khaleda said BNP is not so old party, but it is the largest and most popular party in Bangladesh.

"Whenever the party assumes power, it carries out development works and welfare activities for the country and its people," she told her audience.

Criticising the recent violence of Awami League, she said the party wants to make Bangladesh a dysfunctional state.

"They have no respect for the president, chief adviser and even the chief justice," she told the function.

She observed that all their (AL) activities proved that the people and their life and property are not safe in their hands.

Brahmanbaria BNP President Ukil Abdus Sattar and former lawmakers from the district also spoke at the function.

Poll atmosphere

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establish the people's fundamental right of voting," she also said adding that the power of the people is the highest power and Awami League along with the people will wipe out all kinds of conspiracies and blueprints for election engineering.

She said Iajuddin failed to maintain the dignity of teachers by kowtowing to BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia's diktats.

"Iajuddin's statements and actions do not conform to each other. He says one thing but does another. How can he work neutrally if he accepts Khaleda Zia as his master? It is very disgraceful for the community of teachers because he used to be a teacher at Dhaka University," Sheikh Hasina said.

She claimed that literacy rate in the country did not increase in the last five years due to the immediate past government's negligence towards eradicating illiteracy and now the literacy rate has declined to 61 percent from the earlier rate of 74 percent.

"Question papers of medical college admission tests, BCS examinations under Public Service Commission (PSC), and even appointment tests of primary school teachers had been leaked out by the loyalists of BNP-Jamaat alliance but Iajuddin did not take

any step against them," she said.

The National Front of Teachers and Employees (NFTE) organised the national convention on 'repression on teachers during BNP-Jamaat alliance government's tenure', where teachers who had been 'deprived' in the last five years, participated.

NFTE Chief Co-ordinator also Convener Prof Quazi Farruque disclosed the names of 11 top brasses of the education sector and 15 former BNP-Jamaat legislators who had carried out different types of repressions on teachers in the last five years.

He said NFTE will arrange an international conference very soon where around 300 organisations of teachers from different countries will be invited to participate.

Eleven 'deprived' teachers from different parts of the country narrated at the convention their experiences of repression in the hands of the leaders and cadres of BNP-Jamaat alliance.

Dhaka University Teachers Association General Secretary Dr Akhtaruzzaman, its former president AAUMS Arefin Siddique, former Dhaka University vice-chancellor AK Azad Chowdhury, AL Education Affairs Secretary Nurul Islam Nahid also addressed the convention among others.

Resolve political crisis

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surcharges imposed on the containers.

"From December 1, we have to pay \$200 surcharge per container when the port experiences congestion, even though we are not responsible for the congestion" M Bashir Ullah, director of Bangladesh Steel Mill Owners Association, complained.

The FBCCI president pointed out that if the port users are compelled to pay \$200 against each container, by the year-end, they would have to pay Tk 1,000 crore in surcharge. And that would be an enormous pressure on the economy.

Leaders from chambers of commerce, industry, trade, and industrial associations from across the country participated in the AGM where all discussion centred on the present volatile political situation.

The business leaders urged the FBCCI president to organise demonstrations under the banner of FBCCI calling on all political parties to keep business and economy beyond the purview of political programmes and ensure a sound political atmosphere for a sound economy.

The leaders recommended that FBCCI should compile a list of businesses showing losses incurred due to the ongoing political unrest and press the government to compensate for the losses. They also said it would not be fair to the business community if the banks charge interest on loans during the blockade programmes.

"We have been unable to run our industries for the last one month. As such, we decided to hand over the keys to our business establishments to the president within the next few days," Liakat Ali Milon of Bangladesh Specialised Textile Mills and Power Loom Industries Association, said urging the FBCCI president to join the programme.

Referring to the current political crisis, the FBCCI president vowed to keep the federation above all political influence and continue FBCCI's activities for economic and business purposes.

The FBCCI president also said its board of directors will be holding an emergency meeting today to discuss the prevailing situation of the country and adopt a course of action.

Hills people

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was not implemented as the bureaucrats and the last two regimes were not interested in implementing it.

He was speaking at a discussion meeting jointly arranged by PCJSS and the Indigenous People's Forum at the Women Volunteers Association auditorium yesterday.

Larma, also president of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), said if the government did not implement the peace treaty and the majority Bangla speaking people keep on exploiting the hill people, they would be compelled to start a guerrilla war again.

Larma said many people of the hill tracts could not enrol themselves in the recently updated voter list and the authorities did not care about it even after receiving complaints.

He said Bangladeshis started fighting the Pakistani rulers since they did not meet their demands. The people of the hill tracts would do the same if the Bangalee rulers do not meet their demands, he added.

He said Sheikh Hasina, the Awami League president, had the intention to do something good for the indigenous people but the immediate past govern-

ment did not have any urge to implement the treaty.

The speakers at the meeting said the CHT should be treated as a national problem. A number of speakers said the people of the hill tracts should be involved in the larger political alliances of the country.

Pankaj Bhattacharya, presidium member of Gonoforum, Haider Akbar Khan Rano, politbu member of Workers' Party of Bangladesh, Rashed Khan Menon, president of Workers' Party of Bangladesh, Hasanul Haq Inal, president of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, Mamunur Rashid, playwright, Prof Mesbah Kamal, Sadeka Halim, teachers of Dhaka University, Robindra Nath Soren, general secretary of Jatiya Adivasi Parishad, Sanjeeb Drong, general secretary of Indigenous People's Forum of Bangladesh also spoke at the meeting.

Matiur Rahman, editor of the Prothom Alo, urged the hill tracts leaders to increase their political power and make the Bangla speaking people understand the CHT issues. He assured the audience of focusing on the hills issues in his newspaper and inform the people of the matter.

Dhaka trade fair

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lag behind," he added.

Participation of the foreign firms is poor in this year's fair, with only 53 companies from seven countries displaying their products. Among them, Malaysia is the 'large-scale' participant at the 12th fair while other foreign participants are firms from India, Iran, Pakistan, Singapore, Thailand, and the USA.

A total of 418 companies are taking part.

The participating companies are showcasing a wide range of local and foreign products including machinery, equipment and materials for agriculture and gardening, carpet, chemical and allied products, cosmetics, dairy products, electrical and electronic items, food and groceries, gift items, handicrafts, home appliances, leather, leather goods and footwear, sports gear, sanitary ware, textile and garments, toys and stationery, watches and clocks, jewellery, ceramics, melamine, car and plastic products.

Speaking as the special guest, Adviser Dr Akbar Ali Khan said the

government has already formed a high-power committee, headed by the commerce secretary, to resolve the businessmen's problems that they have been facing during the last few days due to political unrest.

FBCCI President Mir Nasir Hossain in his speech urged the CA to find a solution to the ongoing political impasse as early as possible.

Launched in 1995, the main objective of the DITF was to attract the foreign buyers to promote exportable goods produced in Bangladesh. After a few successful events the number of foreign participants started to drop. Twenty-two countries took part in the DITF in 2002. The next year, the number went down to 20, followed by 16 in 2004 and only 10 last year.

Tickets for the fair will be available at the entrance at Tk 10 for adults and Tk 5 for children.

The fair to be concluded on January 2, will remain open to visitors from 10:00am to 9:00pm on weekdays and from 10:00am to 10:00pm on the holidays.

Oli

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said, adding, "The country's armed forces came forward in 1971 and 1990 to overcome the crisis then. Why are you silent now when the situation is more critical?"

Oli, who recently left BNP to float the LDP with former president Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, also urged the armed forces to save the country from the 'corrupt gang'.

Referring to former prime minister Khaleda Zia and her son Tarique Rahman, Oli said, "They have looted and siphoned off crores of taka abroad in last five years."

"The BNP-Jamaat evil force is conspiring to rig the elections as they know people will not vote for them," said LDP Secretary General Major (ret) Abdul Mannan.

"How can other political parties join the elections when BNP men are holding the offices of the president and chief adviser and the election commissioners?" he questioned.

Presided over by Dr Nazimuddin Ahmed, the meeting was also addressed by Shah Ahmed Badal and Mokarram Hossain Daradi.

Tigers face Zim

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Lanka in the same series.

Bangladesh yesterday named a 12-member team leaving out dashing middle-order batsman Tushar Imran and left-arm seamer Syed Rasel.

Chances of making any change to the team that won in Khulna are highly unlikely, but the think-tank only included all-rounder Forhad Reza in the squad keeping in mind the dew factor in the day-night match.

On the other hand, the tourists hinted at changes in their playing eleven after two new guys, spinner Graeme Cremer and paceman Ed Rainsford, who just arrived in Bangladesh two days back, are likely to take the field.

Meanwhile, former Bangladesh Test bowler Enamul Haque will make his debut as an international umpire when he stands along with Pakistani Nadeem Gauri in the match.

TEAMS BANGLADESH (from): Habibul Bashar (captain), Shahriar Nafees, Mehrab Hossain, Aftab Ahmed, Sakib Al Hasan, Mohammad Ashraf, Khaled Mashud, Mohammad Rafique, Abdur Razzak, Mashrafe Bin Mortuza, Shahadat Hossain and Forhad Reza.

ZIMBABWE (from): Chamunorwa Chibhabha, Hamilton Masakadza, Brendan Taylor, Stuart Matsikinyeri, Elton Chigumbura, Gary Brent, Prosper Utseya (captain), Anthony Ireland, Mluleki Nkala, Sean Williams, Keith Dabengwa, Christopher Mpfou, Blessing Mahwire, Ryan Higgins and Tinotenda Mawoyo, Graeme Cremer, Ed Rainsford.

Uttara meet

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meeting on November 26 with the chief adviser to the caretaker government and President Iajuddin Ahmed decided to probe the incident. But mysteriously, the establishment ministry issued a circular detailing the TOR that involves investigation of similar past incidents.

The advisers later said their (the council of advisers) decision did not correspond with the circular issued by the establishment ministry.

The Establishment Secretary AFM Solaiman Chowdhury, however, told a group of reporters that the ministry was implementing a government directive while issuing the circular.

About 40 former and in-service government high officials joined Mahmudur Rahman's secret 'party' in his business office at Sector 1 of Uttara in the capital last week. Among them, 15 have been learnt to be holding posts of assistant secretaries and joint secretaries in the current civil administration. They are also known to have close ties with BNP.

As journalists gathered in front of the meeting venue, the officials fled the scene frantically trying to hide their faces with their hands and by pulling their shirts over their faces.

The incident sparked strong reactions across the country as the news made to the front page of many newspapers.

Cops identify 4

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official told The Daily Star last night seeking anonymity.

Meanwhile, the two cases filed for vandalising the offices of the attorney general and the chief justice and for creating disturbance in court proceedings were transferred to the intelligence unit yesterday.

"We have collected the case dockets and negatives of snaps from the video footages taken by different television channels," Additional Deputy Commissioner of the intelligence unit Shafiqul Islam told The Daily Star.

He said they will launch a massive manhunt to arrest the assailants after collecting all details.

Meanwhile, two people arrested on Friday by Shahbagh police in connection with the vandalism were placed on a one-day remand yesterday.

Metropolitan Magistrate Mir Ali Reza granted the remand after investigation officers (IO) of the two cases prayed for a five-day remand for Abdul Mannan and Mohammad Afzal -- saying the two might have links with the attack.

33 killed as bridge falls on Indian train

AFP, New Delhi

At least 33 people were killed when a 140-year-old bridge toppled on an inter-city passenger train in eastern India, a spokesman of the state-run rail company said.

Rail officials had earlier placed the toll at 20 dead and 19 injured in the accident at a rail station in the Indian state of Bihar.

"The death toll has now touched 33 and also 18 other passengers are in hospital with injuries," spokesman Ashok Ganguli told AFP by telephone from the site of the accident in Bhagalpur town.

"Now there are no more bodies in the crushed coach," he said, adding that the rescue operation had also been called off. Rail officials had earlier placed the toll at five dead and 19 injured in the accident at a rail station in the Indian state of Bihar.

"Some of these people are very seriously injured so the death toll could change," spokesman Samir Goswami told AFP by telephone from the site of the accident in Bhagalpur town.

Among the dead were an infant girl and seven women, a senior police official said from Bhagalpur.

The Press Trust of India (PTI) quoting another official put the death toll at 32 killed.

"Twenty-seven bodies have so far been brought to the Bhagalpur station for identification," PTI quoted rail security deputy chief Ajay Verma as saying.

"Thirty-two bodies have been recovered including that of seven

women and five children and an operation was on to search for passengers in the coach," Verma told PTI.

Railway company spokesman Goswami, however, said rescuers had brought out 20 bodies from the mangled carriage that the bridge, which was being dismantled, collapsed onto.

"As per our knowledge 20 people have expired so far," he said as hundreds of Bhagalpur residents converged at the crash site and raised anti-government slogans, witnesses said.

Television footage showed the train car covered in rubble and hundreds of onlookers watching the rescue operations.

"Dismantling was going on of a 140-year-old bridge at Bhagalpur station. The third arch fell on the coach," said Goswami.

Railway officials said they were unsure how many passengers were in the coach when the accident occurred, but that at least 30 passengers emerged unscathed from one end of it just after the incident.

India's Railway Minister Lalu Prasad Yadav has called for an inquiry into the accident and ordered that two engineers overseeing the dismantling of the bridge be suspended.

The interstate train had crossed into Bihar en route to Jampalpur town when the accident occurred at Bhagalpur, 1,240km east of the Indian capital New Delhi.

Indian Railways, one of the world's largest rail networks, transports more than 13 million passengers daily and reports some 300 accidents a year.

Businessman

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and Mansur Alam Titu alias Tarun, 30.

In Paltan, unidentified gunmen shot dead Alamgir in the early hours.

Bilal Hossain, security guard of the apartment building where Alamgir lived, told The Daily Star, "I saw him (Alamgir) going out to say his Fajr prayers at dawn. A few minutes later, hearing two gun shots, I opened the gate again to see what had happened." At that point, Alamgir ran back into the building and collapsed, Bilal added.

He was then rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where on-duty doctors declared him dead.

Contacted, Alamgir's family sources could not say anything about the motive behind the killing. Paltan police suspect that he might have been killed due to business-related feuds.

Meanwhile, President of Polwel Super Market Shop Owners' Association A Kayyum Talukder Moni told The Daily Star, "Alamgir had no enemy that we know of, but he was uncompromising and used to protest misdeeds."

Protesting the killing, the businessmen of the market wore black badges and blockaded the Naya Paltan road for nearly half an hour in the afternoon. They also demanded immediate arrest and exemplary punishment of the killers.

Locals said that a few days

back, his son's mobile phone was hijacked and the police arrested the local muggers. They suspect that the muggers might kill him in an act of revenge.

Mahbubur Rahman, the dead's younger brother, filed a murder case with Paltan Police Station.

Meanwhile, an angry mob beat up Amir severely at Dakkhin Banasri in Khilgaon suspecting him to be a criminal and handed him over to police. Later on, police sent critically injured Amir to DMCH. He succumbed to his injuries at around 8:00pm.

In Mohamadpur, Tarun was shot by a group of three gunmen at Jakir Hossain Road. Police rushed him to the DMCH where on-duty doctors declared him dead. The deceased had marks of bullet at his head, hospital sources said.

A resident of the Tajmahal Road, Tarun had criminal records, police said adding that he might have been killed due to some internal feud of his gang. His attackers, however, managed to escape.

In another incident in Mirpur-2, three people, including a security guard were left bullet-hit when three unidentified gunmen opened fire near the Postal Industries indiscriminately at about 4:00pm.

The injured --- Mizanur Rahman, 35, his brother-in-law Bacchu Hawlader and the security guard Abdul Hye Munshi, 55, were admitted to the DMCH.

Blockade likely

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oars, poles, sticks, sickles and other firearms and holding rallies and processions on VIP roads still remain effective until further announcement.

Around 20,000 members of police, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) will be deployed in the capital to maintain law and order, DMP sources said.

"We will withdraw the blockade only if the president resigns from the post of chief adviser and appoints a non-partisan person in the post as per the constitution and meet our several other demands to create a congenial atmosphere for a free