

Polls must be held on time

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of parliament.
In her 25-minute speech, Khaleda launched a blistering attack on the AL, labelling it as an "anti-democratic" and "anti-people" party. She also defended President Iajuddin Ahmed's assumption of the office of chief adviser, his decision to deploy the army, activities of the caretaker government and Election Commission (EC), particularly the latter's updating of the voter list.

The grand rally was organised by the Dhaka city unit of the four-party alliance a day after a similar programme of the AL-led 14-party alliance that announced to boycott and resist the election under the current schedule.

Tens of thousands of leaders and activists of the BNP and its allies gathered at Paltan Maidan in a bid to show the alliance's political strength.

The alliance's activists and supporters started gathering at the venue since noon. They were carrying banners, placards and electoral symbols of their parties and were chanting slogans. Hundreds of buses carried a huge number of four-party workers from across the country to the venue.

Security was beefed up in and around the venue and police restricted traffic on the roads to the Paltan ground, which caused a huge traffic jam in most parts of the city.

Leaders of the four-party alliance countered the demands of its arch-rival political alliance and reiterated their demand for holding the election on January 22 as per the current schedule.

Khaleda said the next election is important for protecting the country as well as the constitution. She asked her alliance's leaders and workers to make all-out preparations for the election.

"We will have to protect the country, the constitution and democracy...We will have to keep continuing the process of development that began during the four-party alliance government's tenure," she said.

Khaleda invited the AL-led alliance to contest the election to prove its popularity. "Take part in the election if you have enough confidence in the people. We will accept the people's verdict," she said.

"But the 14-party alliance is afraid of contesting the election because it

does not have the people's support," she said, adding, "They are now conspiring to foil the election."

In defence of Iajuddin's assuming the office of chief adviser Khaleda said, "The president was forced to assume the responsibilities of the chief adviser because of Awami League's non-cooperation in appointing a chief adviser. Justice KM Hasan could not take the charge because of Awami League's anarchy."

"The president assumed the office of chief adviser to save the country and the constitution. He thought of all the alternatives before deciding to head the caretaker government," Khaleda said.

"But soon after formation of the caretaker government, the Awami League started raising demands one after another. The caretaker government also implemented their demands," she said.

"In line with their demands, the caretaker government reshuffled the administration extensively," the BNP chairperson said, adding, "In 2001, however, the caretaker government did not bring such massive changes in the administration and the Election Commission and we participated in the election under the administration and Election Commission designed by the Awami League."

Defending the president's order for deployment of the armed forces, Khaleda said the armed forces have to discharge their responsibilities if the government deploys them to save people's lives and properties.

"The politics of Awami League is not for peace and safety. It is for creating godfathers," Khaleda said, adding, "That is the reason why the president decided to deploy the army."

On the activities of the EC, the BNP chairperson said it has updated the voter list in line with the High Court directives.

"The Election Commission started preparing a fresh voter list but the Awami League went to the court to stop the initiative in order to keep the fake voters in the list prepared during its tenure," Khaleda said, referring to the European Union's findings that the electoral roll prepared in 2000 contained 1.3 crore excess voters.

On the 14-party alliance's demand for voter ID cards, Khaleda alleged that the BNP had initiated a project for voter ID cards but the AL government stopped it.

"Now it will take three years to

provide the voters with ID cards. Better, the ID cards will be provided after this election," she said.

Speaking at the rally, Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Matiur Rahman Nizami blasted the AL-led 14-party alliance for raising demands one after another. He said the people are waiting for the election and it is the responsibility of the caretaker government to resist any one trying to create obstacles to the election.

Nizami asked the foreign diplomats to "respect the people's sentiment not the lobbying by political leaders".

He criticised the advisers to the caretaker government, saying a few advisers in their initiative to resolve crisis "created unexpected situations that inspired the Awami League to take a hard-line attitude about meeting their demands".

Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP) Chairman Nazimul Rahman Manjur urged the caretaker government to save the country by holding election within its stipulated 90-day tenure.

Terming the caretaker government's package proposal a wrong decision, Nazimul said this caretaker government will be held guilty in the history if it fails to hold the election in scheduled time.

On Jatiya Party (JP) Chairman HM Ershad's joining the AL-led alliance, BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said, "The two parties [AL and JP] have discarded their ideologies only to go to power."

Bhuiyan said, "The Awami League said that the High Court verdict against Ershad is not fair, but Ershad was jailed during the Awami League rule also."

He said the AL and its allies will be responsible if the country's democratic process is destroyed.

On the AL allegation that the caretaker government has wasted 45 days, Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mujahid said the time was lost as the caretaker government had to be involved in the "ill politics" of the Awami League.

BNP Standing Committee members Saifur Rahman, Mosharraf Hossain and KM Obaidur Rahman, Islami Oikya Jote faction Chairman Fazlul Haque Amine, BJP leaders Shamim Al Mamun and Habibullah Belali also spoke at the rally, among others.

12 injured

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Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) leaders brought the situation under control around 2:30pm. JCD and Shibir, however, blamed each other for the clash.

Immediately after the battle CMC authorities in an academic council meeting decided to close the college until January 4.

They, however, withdrew their decision when BMA and National Doctors Forum (NDF) leaders in a meeting assured the CMC authorities of reaching an understanding between the feuding JCD and Shibir, sources said.

Ward commissioner

FROM PAGE 1
Eight other members of the Grameen Bank board were also present at the prize giving ceremony in Oslo, capital of Norway. They along with Afroz Yunus, wife of Dr Yunus, and other family members of the Nobel laureate also came back home yesterday on the same flight.

Yunus told the awaiting journalists that the world leaders he met during his week long visit wanted to know about the political situation in Bangladesh. "I assured them that the election will be held peacefully as the people of Bangladesh are very conscious and they want to bring back peace."

He committed to spend the money that he received with the peace prize, for welfare of the people. He also reiterated his plan to eradicate poverty from the world. "The people are poor because they have been made poor artificially."

Explaining his social business formula Dr Yunus said according to the new concept investors would not expect profit from their investments. They would rather be happy if the money is invested for welfare of the mankind. He claimed that many western companies already responded positively to his new formula.

Thousands of people including many dignitaries gathered at Zia International Airport yesterday morning to welcome and receive Dr Muhammad Yunus, who brought home the world's most prestigious award.

A group of prominent citizens including Dr Shoeb Ahmed, an adviser to the caretaker government, Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud, a former adviser to a previous caretaker government, Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, and Hossain Zillur Rahman received Dr Yunus and his team on the tarmac of the airport as they disembarked from a Boeing 737 which had landed around 11:15 yesterday morning.

A chartered plane of Hamburg International Airline flew the country's first Nobel laureate and his team back home directly from Paris. Yunus was garlanded heavily on the tarmac and he waved to the welcoming people who gathered there in his honour.

Dozens of journalists from various electronic and print media had been waiting in the VIP lounge of the airport since morning where Dr Yunus smilingly posed for photographs, after getting there.

In the parking area of the airport several thousand people, mainly members of various Grameen organisations and Grameen Bank, had been waiting for him. As Dr Yunus reached the parking lot after completion of airport formalities, thousands burst into cheers and showered him with petals of flowers.

Many young people wearing Grameen made dresses danced on the street expressing joy for Yunus winning the Nobel peace prize.

Addressing the enthusiastic crowd, Yunus said, "We have come home with the world's most prestigious prize and through this Bangladesh showed

360 new species discovered in Borneo since 1994: WWF

AFP, Jakarta

A new species of insect, animal or plant is discovered every month in Borneo, said conservation group WWF said yesterday as it warned that logging and plantations threatened the fragile "Heart of Borneo" ecosystem.

Between 1994 and 2004, at least 361 new species have been discovered in Borneo," WWF Indonesia director Mubariq Ahmad told AFP.

"In the past 10 years, there is discovery of new species every month. We had found 260 new insects, 50 plants, seven frogs, snakes, six lizards, 30 fresh water fish, five crabs, two snakes and a toad," he added.

Recent exotic discoveries include poisonous "sticky frogs," "forest walking catfish" able to travel short distances out of water and the transparent "oil palm catfish".

Large animals have also yielded surprises, with the Borneo orang-utan found to be a distinct species to its Sumatran cousin and the island's pygmy elephants recently reclassified as a separate sub-species.

"The discoveries of the new species in the area proves that Borneo, one of the world's last remaining rain forests, is among the most important biodiversity areas in the world," he said.

WWF International launched its "Heart of Borneo" program two years ago, covering a 22 million hectare rain forest shared by Indonesia, Malaysia and the oil-rich kingdom of Brunei.

Ahmad, who has visited the area numerous times, said its forests were a major source of water for Borneo, describing them as the island's "water tank".

"If the forest is destroyed, the whole

island will be devastated because most of the rivers on the island originate here," he said.

Ahmad warned that logging and palm oil plantation activities risk destroying the biodiversity in the area but acknowledged that the three Southeast Asian countries have committed to protect it.

"We were alarmed by some efforts to expand large-scale palm oil plantations in the area but Jakarta stopped it. There are also logging activities but we want to work with them to ensure sustainable development," he said.

Ahmad said the upland area was not suitable for palm oil and was working with timber companies to ensure the environment was not destroyed.

"Oil palm plantations and logging are current primary threats to the forest," he said.

Large areas of forest are being cleared for commercial uses, including rubber, oil palm and pulp production, the WWF said.

Ahmad said Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei have agreed to protect the area and would ink a formal agreement early next year to ensure sustainable development of the forest.

"There is political will by them to protect the 'Heart of Borneo' forest area," he said.

"Losing the 'Heart of Borneo' would be an unacceptable tragedy not only for Borneo, but for all Asia, and the planet," the WWF said.

Yunus returns home

FROM PAGE 1
"I hope good sense will prevail among all," he said. Yunus described the moment of receiving the Nobel peace prize as the most memorable moment in his life.

While talking to the journalists at Grameen Bank head office immediately after arrival with the peace prize he avoided questions about the country's politics. "Today I shall talk only about the peace prize and avoid discussion on politics."

The Norwegian Nobel Committee formally handed over the peace prize for 2006 to Yunus and Grameen Bank on December 10. Taslima Begum, a board member of Grameen Bank, received the peace prize on behalf of the bank.

Eight other members of the Grameen Bank board were also present at the prize giving ceremony in Oslo, capital of Norway. They along with Afroz Yunus, wife of Dr Yunus, and other family members of the Nobel laureate also came back home yesterday on the same flight.

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Addressing the enthusiastic crowd, Yunus said, "We have come home with the world's most prestigious prize and through this Bangladesh showed

the world what its people can do."

"We should try our best to bring more prestige for the nation," he said. He thanked the 70 lakh poor borrowers of Grameen Bank for bringing the peace prize home.

Later, Yunus came to Grameen Bank head office in Mirpur escorted by a convoy of around fifty trucks full of people. Grameen Bank members also celebrated the home coming of the peace prize and the laureate through singing patriotic songs and performing dances at the head office after the arrival of the delegation.

After receiving the peace prize in Norway, Yunus and the Grameen Bank delegation also visited Britain, Sweden, Denmark, and France. Top leaders of those countries hosted receptions in honour of Yunus and his delegation.

The king and queen of Norway for the first time hosted a banquet in honour of a Nobel peace laureate.

In France, President Jacques Chirac hosted a reception for Yunus in Palais de l'Elysée and discussed the micro credit programme of Grameen Bank with him, the Nobel laureate told the journalists.

Cherry Blair, wife of British Prime Minister Tony Blair, also received the delegation in their weekend cottage, he added.

World famous singers participated in a concert organised in honour of Yunus in Oslo during the visit. Nritanchal, a cultural troupe which accompanied Yunus during the trip, staged cultural shows in the countries they visited reflecting Bangladeshi culture. Shibly Mohammad and Shamim Ara Nipa led the troupe.

Maksuda

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"As far I have heard, she was injured at a party she went to with him [Khokon]," Abbas told The Daily Star.

He said that due to Maksuda's critical condition he was not able to get more information.

"How can I quiz such a critical patient," he said.

Asked if Khokon was hurt in the shooting, Abbas said, "I have also heard something like that, but I don't know what really happened."

Since the incident, it has not been possible to trace Khokon either at his house or office or contact him on his cellphone.

Abbas said: "Don't ask me anything about him. I don't have any contact with him, and I don't want to make any comment about him."

Motijeh police said neither Mirza Abbas, nor anyone from his family informed them about the shooting or anyone being wounded. No general diary or case has yet been filed.

Abbas said he had not informed the police as he had been busy looking after Maksuda. "Being busy with the patient, I did not think anything of that. I think the law will move on its own course," he said.

The Daily Star has learnt that Khokon was treated for bullet wounds at a hospital in Shajahanpur. A physician, who did the surgery, said Khokon suffered bullet wounds in his hand and named the room number where Khokon had been treated.

Reporters found the named hospital room empty and there was no record of a patient by Khokon's name in the hospital register. However a source in the hospital later confirmed that Khokon has been shifted from the room to avoid journalists.

Tk 1cr Saudi currencies seized at ZIA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Customs officials at Zia International Airport seized Saudi currencies worth over Tk 1.12 crore from a Singapore bound passenger's luggage on Monday night.

The officials spotted the suitcase in the baggage area after customs superintendent Ashok Barua received secret information about a large cache of foreign currencies was being smuggled out through flight SQ 435.

The customs officials found 1,182 Saudi rials in 500 denominations in the suitcase with passenger name Khan/Md Farid, SQ-381545 inscribed on the luggage tag. A security sticker of the civil aviation authority of Bangladesh was also labelled on it.

The authorities however could not arrest the owner of the luggage as the flight SQ 435 already departed for Singapore by then.

JCD, BCL clash

FROM PAGE 16

at the Taposhi Rabeya Hall, allegedly desecrated a picture of Sheikh Mujib, the sources added.

The BCL activists were upset at this news and yesterday morning they went to the vice chancellor's (VC) office to demand punishment of the house tutor.

Enamul Haque, the proctor, and other officials of the university locked in a scuffle with the agitated BCL men and at one stage, the proctor was physically assaulted, said RU VC Prof. Altaf Hossain at a news conference in his office.

The BCL activists also ransacked the VC's office and windowpanes of the administrative building, campus sources said.

The attack on the proctor, who is known to be a BNP loyalist, infuriated JCD activists and they along with university employees loyal to BNP and Jamaat swooped on the BCL activists with hockey sticks and iron rods injuring the 35 BCL men.

The injured were identified as RU BCL president Ibrahim Hossain Moon, general secretary Ayeen Uddin, BCL leaders Rashidul Islam, Ahmed, Rubel, Turjo, Masud, Polish, Masud (2), Mamun, Ujjal, Shamim, Emdad, Tunin, Kabir, Nasir and Joy.

JCD convener Nuruzzaman Likhon told journalists that they would resist the strike called by BCL.

The proctor said that adequate security measures were taken to hold admission tests and to maintain law and order on the campus.

EC working

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Asked about holding the election after the stipulated 90 days by amending the constitution, the acting CEC said, "Constitution can be amended by parliament. As there is no parliament now, it is a big problem."

He declined to reply when asked about seeking time from the Supreme Court for holding the polls after 90 days. "It is a delicate question, I will not make any comment," he said.

"Lets see what the political alliances say in this regard," Mahfuzur Rahman said as reporters wanted to know whether it is possible to hold the election after expiry of the present tenure of the caretaker government if all political alliances reach a consensus on this.

On the possibility of changing the last date of submission of nominations for the elections due to the Awami League-led 14-party combine's hartal programme tomorrow, the acting CEC said, "We are yet to think about it."

Asked if the EC would take any initiative to bring the 14-party in the election process, he said, "It is the caretaker government which will have to take initiative in this regard."

"What I can do alone?" he asked and sought cooperation of all parties in holding the polls.

Banks asked

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out house building loans are also to be considered defaulters.

All branch managers have been ordered to be with the ROs during scrutiny of the nomination papers with all pertinent papers at their disposal.

Banking sources said in the 2001 election, some 300 candidates' nominations were cancelled because of similar steps taken by the central bank.

But the political big shots defaulting on loans could easily have their cases in this regard stayed by the High Court and later contest the elections. In previous instances, only the independent candidates and those who belonged to small political parties had been disqualified from the polls, said sources.

To prevent recurrence of those practices, the BB has issued a circular last week. It has asked the banks to take strong measures to prevent the loan defaulters from exploiting the legal loopholes to stand for election.

SC stays collection

FROM PAGE 1

Barrister Omar Sadat assisted Azmalul in moving for Abu Safa who filed an appeal this year against the HC order.

Disposing of a writ petition filed by three lawyers, the HC on May 24, 2005 ordered the EC to gather personal details like academic qualification, profession, source of income, criminal records and some other information about the aspirants to parliament and publish those to help voters choose their representatives properly.

The ruling had been welcomed by the cross-section of people including the EC as it required the commission to bring out the specifics like a candidate's criminal records, involvement in corruption and owning black money and so on, if they had any.

Surprisingly, the apex court yesterday gave its decision without hearing any submission from the three petitioners.

Even more remarkable was that no sooner the SC order was pronounced than the EC implemented it, according to an EC press release.

In line with the HC order, the EC had provided a three-page form for the candidates to give eight types of personal information. But this form is now of no use.

Previously, the same EC had delayed implementation of the HC directives on the voter list for several weeks on the grounds that it did not receive the copy of the order.

Abu Safa hailing from Swandip filed a petition against the 2005 HC verdict on July 3 the same year at the Supreme Court chamber judge's court. But he could not take out any stay from the SC and instead was asked to file a regular appeal.

The regular one he filed on July 10 this year was granted but he did not get any stay order in this case as well.

"The appeal was pending for hearing at a regular bench of the Supreme Court," noted KM Zahir, one of the three petitioners. "But they have taken this to the vacation bench to obtain an ad-interim order. This cannot be acceptable," he added.

"Holding this sort of hearing without even informing us is quite mysterious," observed Zahir after the stay order yesterday.

Chamber Judge Joydul Abedin who issued the stay order yesterday, had headed the one-member judicial probe committee on the August 21 grenade attack on an Awami League Rally in 2004. The report he came up with was found to be vague.

He had been appointed to the Appellate Division from the HC division a few months before the four-party alliance handed over power to the caretaker government.

100 hurt

FROM PAGE 1
leading to sporadic clashes between the two sides.

District BCL President Biplob Bishwas denounced the role of police during the clashes.

Instead of rein in the illegal activities of the Shibir men, police attacked the innocent leaders and activists of BCL and JCS, he alleged.

Contacted, Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Kotwali Police Station Zahidul denied the allegations accusing the BCL and JCS men of attacking the police.

Gaza truce

FROM PAGE 16
mourners gathered for the funeral of Fatah security man.

The violence has continued despite a ceasefire agreed between the two rivals late Sunday but efforts to contain the crisis were gathering pace Tuesday.

Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniya is to deliver an address in which aides said he would appeal for calm, while the head of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu is set to meet both Abbas and Haniya.

"(Haniya) will not encourage escalation but on the contrary will urge a return to calm and for an end to the crisis," his political advisor Ahmad Yussef said.

Haniya's government has been boycotted by Israel and the West since it took office in March after a shock election win over Abbas's long-dominant Fatah, plunging the Palestinian territories into their worst financial crisis.

Gaza has been rocked by street violence and fit-for-fat attacks since Abbas called Saturday for new elections in a bid to end months of political deadlock following the collapse of talks on forming a national unity government.

But the Hamas-controlled government has denounced as tantamount to a coup.

Abbas, who has been at loggerheads with Hamas since it took power, on Monday described the situation as a "grave internal crisis".

"I have called for early presidential and parliamentary elections so that the people can decide on the base of an acceptable programme to preserve their national interests... and put an end to the siege and crisis," he said.

Zead-Al Malum, one of the counsels for the petitioners, making reference to the SC stay.

The petitioners said they knew nothing about Abu Safa.

Omar Sadat said Safa passed only class eight and still he wants to participate in election. But he is afraid if his educational qualification is published, he might face a kind of discrimination, he added.

When the HC gave the verdict in May 2005, the EC did not file any appeal against it. The commission was already gathering information about the candidates. But the HC verdict brought the EC under compulsion to make public the candidates' information so that the people can pick out right people to represent them.

Zahir yesterday said, "Abu Safa filed a civil petition for a leave to appeal against the High Court order on July 3, 2005. But as is practised, he [the petitioner] did not inform or gave us a copy of the petition. On July 10, 2006, he again filed a regular appeal and this time too he did not inform us. We came to know about this move in November when we saw the appeal in the cause-list pending for regular hearing."

"Then on December 10, 2006, we appointed Syed Mahbubur Rahman as an advocate on-record for the case, and completed other procedures so that when the hearing takes place, we can contest it," Zahir pointed out.