

Advisers tell Zakaria

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Information Adviser Mahbul Alam told reporters after a meeting of the advisers yesterday afternoon.

On voter list correction, he said the electoral roll can be updated up to the day before election and the lists will be available at the district election offices for correction.

The advisers' meeting came up with the changes after three days' negotiation with the two major political alliances led by the BNP and AL to resolve the political deadlock arising out of a face off between them.

The BNP-led four-party alliance has been demanding holding of the election under the current schedule while the AL-led grand alliance has been asking for a new schedule after properly correcting the voter list and creating an atmosphere for holding a free and fair election.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Adviser Shafiqul Haque Chowdhury said they are satisfied with the new decisions and hoped the political deadlock will be resolved. "We took the decision in consulting with the major political parties," he said.

The delegation of AL-led grand alliance, however, said the EC did not consult with it.

"The Election Commission has taken the decision for holding the election in line with a blueprint. We do not agree with the new timetable," M Mokammel Haque, member of the AL advisory council who headed the delegation, told reporters.

Meanwhile, an adviser told The Daily Star requesting anonymity that yesterday's meeting of the advisers' council did not discuss the other issues of the package proposal.

EC RECAST
Information Adviser Mahbul Alam said, "The council of advisers unanimously decided to request Election Commissioner SM Zakaria to go on leave of absence." Although Mahbul said Zakaria "will not be in office during the election", he did not make it clear when Zakaria will go on leave.

Another adviser and the EC secretary also told The Daily Star last night that they do not know anything about it.

The information adviser also avoided the question if they took any decision on the other election commissioner, Modabbar, who aspired to be a four-party alliance candidate from Habiganj-2 constituency before his appointment in the EC on November 27.

It took the council of advisers 16 days to implement its proposal partly as President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed had suddenly opposed the move to send Zakaria on leave of absence.

Coincidentally, the BNP-led alliance, which had earlier agreed

to the proposals, also changed its stance over the Zakaria issue.

Finding the president's differences of opinions with them on implementation of the package proposal, four advisers resigned on December 11.

Later at a meeting of the advisers' council on December 13, however, Iajuddin gave consent to sending Zakaria and Modabbar on leave.

"If both the parties [the AL and BNP] agree, the president will request Election Commissioners Zakaria and Modabbar to go on leave. I believe they will agree to go on leave if both the parties reach a consensus," the president's adviser quoted Iajuddin as telling the US ambassador earlier.

Resigning adviser Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury told the media that the president had himself informed them that he would send Election Commissioner Modabbar on leave of absence as his appointment in the commission triggered enormous controversy.

But the council of advisers retreated from its original package proposal and yesterday took decision only on Zakaria.

Adviser Shafiqul, who was involved in the negotiation with the two political alliances, however, claimed that he was not aware of the content of the original package proposal.

"So far as I knew, sending one election commissioner on leave was in the agenda," he told The Daily Star, adding, "We are now satisfied that we have taken the decision."

Zakaria, who left office at 5:30pm, declined to make any comment on the decision.

GRAND ALLIANCE'S DEMANDS
The three-member delegation of the AL-led grand alliance placed its demands before the EC secretary.

"We have demanded announcement of a new schedule after properly correcting the voter list," said M Mokammel Haque.

In reply to a question, he said, "We [the grand alliance] of course want to participate in the election but there is no environment at present for a free and fair election."

"The Election Commission did not discuss with us before announcing the poll schedule," he said, demanding declaration of a fresh schedule after consulting with all political parties.

"It is better to hold the election late than to hold a controversial election," Mokammel said.

A three-member delegation of Jatiya Party (Manju) led by General Secretary Sheikh Shahidul Islam also met EC Secretary Sarkar yesterday afternoon and placed a set of demands. Their demands include preparation of a flawless voter list and ensuring a level playing field for a free and fair election.

Bush may

FROM PAGE 16
"People were hopping over and trampling bodies as they scattered to get away," said a young man who fled the scene.

The explosion took place on a major road leading through the Karrada area, a once prosperous part of Baghdad which was known as one of the most mixed areas of the city but is now increasingly dominated by Shiites.

Baghdad's universities have come increasingly under attack from Sunni extremist groups, and last week an Internet statement purportedly from the Ansar al-Sunna militant organisation explicitly threatened students.

Both attacks came as Baghdad remained trapped in a vicious cycle of sectarian killings led by warring Sunni insurgent groups and Shiite militias.

And, in a turnaround from past upbeat assessments on the Iraq war, Bush told the Washington Post in an interview posted on the newspaper's Web site: "We're not winning, we're not losing."

He is facing mounting pressure to reduce America's military commitment in Iraq but has also said he wants to expand the overall size of the US armed forces.

White House spokesman Tony Snow said the Iraq troop increase "is something that's being explored" amid media reports that the president might add tens of thousands of US soldiers to help quell what the Pentagon now warns is the worst violence on record. In an interview in the Wednesday edition of The Washington Post, Bush for the first time admitted that the United states was not winning in Iraq.

"We're not winning, we're not losing," Bush said in a marked reversal from a remark he made before the November 7 Congressional election that "Absolutely, we're winning."

Bush's Republican Party lost control of the US Congress in that election to opposition Democrats largely due to voter anger over the war in Iraq.

Bush made no specific mention of the Iraq troop increase except to say that "all options are viable," but told the Post that he ordered the new defense secretary, Robert Gates, to develop a plan to expand the US army and Marine Corps.

"I'm inclined to believe that we do need to increase our troops, the army, the Marines," he said.

Bush declined to put a number on the increase, and disputed former US secretary of state Colin Powell's assertion over the weekend that "the active army is about broken" due to strains from Iraq and Afghanistan.

"I haven't heard the work 'broken,' but I've the word 'stressed,'" said the president, who told the Post that more ground forces were required to fight a global war on terrorism.

"It is an accurate reflection that this ideological war we're in is going to last for a while, and that we're going to need a military that's capable of being able to sustain our efforts and to help us achieve peace," he said.

"We need to reset our military. There's no question the military has been used a lot," said Bush.

Arrestee admits

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Liton and Sheuli, said Sayeed.

However, he denied knowing the criminals involved in the killing and how the victim had been abducted.

The dismembered body of 23-year old Turya, son of a leading jewellery trader in the city, was dug out from Rampura on Monday, after 43 days of his abduction.

Turya was kidnapped on October 29 by a group of criminals led by Shamsunahar Sheuli and his boy friend Shahadat Hossain Liton alias 'Khora' Liton.

In his statement, Sayeed also told the magistrate that he came to Dhaka last year and met Liton at Gulistan. He had been living with Liton and Sheuli in the same place in Rampura since then.

On October 29, while Sayeed was out of town at his village home Barguna, Liton and Sheuli asked him to return to Dhaka. He got back in Dhaka on October 31 and found a body (Turya's) in his room. Liton and Sheuli then asked him to collect gunnysacks, polythene bags and a saw from a nearby market.

The same afternoon, Sheuli and Liton put the body in a gunnysack and asked Sayeed and Mamun to go to Mirpur Cricket Stadium and collect Tk 10 lakh and ten tolas of gold for ransom of the victim from his parents.

They returned home at around 10:30am and hired a van to dump the body at West Rampura, Sayeed added.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested Sayeed on December 6 from his home village in Barguna. Rab, following the leads gathered from Sayeed, arrested Liton, Sheuli and Mamun from different parts of the city.

BDR, BSF

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reinforced its strength at the border outposts. BDR sources said they have put the troops on alert.

When contacted, Major Kamrul Hasan of 41 Rifles Battalion, confirmed the incident.

3 cattle lifters

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eight cows owned by their truck from two cattle sheds owned by next-door neighbours Haji Ashraf Ali and Abdul Hamid.

The villagers rushed to the scene after Abdul Hamid heard the thieves and started screaming out for help. The villagers captured four of the thieves while the others managed to flee.

The villagers' beating was so severe that three of the thieves were killed on the spot and one injured. The mob also set their truck on fire.

Police recovered the bodies at around 5:30am and sent the injured to the upazila health complex. The injured was later transferred to MCHC.

9 top PDB officials

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designs, PDB), Khandker Iftakhar Uddin (executive engineer, Sylhet 150 MW power project), Chowdhury Nuruzzaman (executive engineer, Civil Works Division-2, PDB), Abdul Halim Sarkar (executive engineer, Baghabari power plant) and engineer Kazi Kamal Uddin (resident consultant, PDB).

The officials in question misused their power, in connivance with each other and with ill motives, and accepted low quality and low capacity gas booster compressors for the PDB, incurring a government loss of Tk 14.45 crore, ACC Assistant Director Ashish Kumar Kundu in his First Information Report (FIR) to the police said.

The contract between the PDB and Harbin stipulated that Harbin supply and install a Man Turbo gas booster compressor (GBC) system that had been manufactured in either France, Germany or the United States. The PDB board approved this decision at a meeting on May 5, 2003, adding that Harbin could provide the same device from any other globally reputed manufacturer providing it could be approved at the project design level.

Upon signing the contract on June 8, 2003, Harbin stated that it was unable to provide the Man Turbo GBC, and would instead provide the same device from the "globally reputable" SGL. Instead Harbin supplied a low quality and low capacity set of GBC's, manufactured by Shenyang Gufengji Ltd (SGL), China.

The project's director Fatimi initiated the process to accept Harbin's deviation proposal, which was further endorsed by other high officials, including chairman SA

Mayeed, despite objections from the project's consultant.

This deviation is further critical as the PDB did not seek the necessary approval from the board or ministry for project equipment to be received from an alternate country of origin than those stipulated in the initial contract.

A seven-member PDB Basic Design Approval Team (PDBBDAT) visited China, whose members were: Dr AKM Azad, Akhatarul Islam, Naimul Hossain Khan, Khandker Iftakhar Uddin, Chowdhury Nuruzzaman, Abdul Hakim Sarkar and Kazi Kamal Uddin Ekram. During the visit Harbin informed the PDBBDAT of some serious parameter changes, clearly stating that the proposed device was not appropriate. Notwithstanding, the team gave positive comments and approved the GBC upon return.

According to data of the PDB and Power Grid Company of Bangladesh (PGCB), the grossly flawed Tk 360 crore Tongji plant remained out of action for 2231 hours exclusively due to the plant's incompetent Chinese builder Harbin. This shutdown alone deprived the PDB Tk 42.83 crore of revenue, experts say.

The builder's faults include the installation of sub-standard equipment such as gas booster compressors and gas compressors, air compressors, mist eliminator motors, gas relief valves and an assortment of different types of filters.

Any other persons found to be involved in the scandal through further investigations will also be held accountable, the FIR said.

Port performance

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facing non-cooperation from the port workers since the operation of the crane by the private company resumed on December 15, sources said, adding that the port operators do not place the trailer under the spreader in a proper way for loading and unloading the containers quickly. The operators are also not keeping the containers at proper places causing space problems in the RTG yard, the source said.

Private company Saif Powertec Limited in a letter to the Chittagong Port Authority alleged that the port operators are not providing sufficient trailers and straddle carriers for smooth movement and shifting of containers.

At a meeting on Tuesday, the port authority discussed the matter and decided to give a warning to the port operators about their alleged non-cooperation.

The Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry in a letter to the CPA also urged it to accelerate the back up services for full utilisation of the gantry cranes. Managing Director of Saif Powertec Tarafder Ruhul Amin, however, claimed that his operators are handling 25-30 containers per operation hour despite non-cooperation from the CPA operators.

The government installed the sophisticated cranes spending over Tk 150 crore in January this year and at first tried to operate those by the port operators. As the speed of the crane operation by port operators was very slow, the government appointed private company Saif Powertec Limited for its operation in June this year.

The private company appointed trained foreign personnel and increased the handling of containers to 25-30 per hour from 10-12 by the port operators. The private company, however, charged Tk 470

for handling each container.

The port workers who had been relieved from the job started non-cooperating with the private company. With the beginning of country-wide political agitation programme in October those port operators created barrier in private operation.

They kept the CCT besieged for over two weeks demanding cancellation of the agreement with the private company. Later, the port operators backed by Chittagong city Mayor Mohiuddin Chowdhury took the charge of the gantry cranes and started operation by themselves.

But the private company filed a writ petition with the High Court and obtained a rule nisi in favour of them. Following the High Court verdict, the private company resumed their operation on December 15.

Outlaw leader

FROM PAGE 16
Amzad Hossain, 35, son of Rahatul Islam of Chandpur under the same upazila.

According to a Rab press release, after being tipped-off, a team of Rab 6 went to Debipur field at around 4:00am where members of PBCP Lal Pataka were supposed to hold a meeting.

Rab cordoned the filed and called on the criminals to surrender. The outlaws ignored the call and opened fire on Rab sparking off an hour-long shootout between the outlaws and the law enforcement agency.

Amzad was found dead on the field after the shootout was over while his accomplices managed to flee, the press release claimed.

Rab recovered a firearm and 10 bullets from the spot.

According to police, Amzad was accused in different cases including four for murder filed with Gangni and sadar police stations in Meherpur.

Gas sale deal with Niko

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Bapex. It has been producing s between 20 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) and 30 mmcf gas while the country consumes over 1,450 mmcf.

Tengratila blowout compensation

The government remains silent on the Tengratila blowout compensation issue. Based on two investigation reports, the government a year ago submitted a claim of 8.9 billion cubic feet (bcf) gas and a Tk 250 crore bank guarantee from Niko as part of a three-stage compensation for the Tengratila blowouts.

The two rounds of blowouts took place in January and June, 2005.

While Niko is unwilling to pay this compensation, the then energy ministry adviser Mahmudur Rahman repeatedly said loss of 8.9 bcf gas from the Tengratila field would be compensated from the Fenfield.

A few months back, in a letter to the government Niko sought an international arbitration to decide on the compensation issue. It sought details on how the government came to the conclusion about the losses caused by the blowouts.

Niko argues that the gas loss due to Tengratila blowouts could not be so high as the field itself has a small reserve.

A Niko study of Tengratila gas field claimed that the field has only

110 bcf gas. But a 1996-97 Petrobrangia study had identified a resource base of 1.9 trillion cubic feet (tcf) there, of which 1.1 tcf can be commercially produced.

To seal off the blown out gas field's well, Niko drilled two wells -- an observation well and a relief well -- with the company's insurer bearing the cost. Petrobrangia suspects that Niko drilled the two wells at the cost of the insurer with the plan to convert one of these into a development well at a convenient time, and show the cost of that well as 'recoverable'.

Back in June-July, Niko tried to test the observation well amid reservations by Bapex and faced difficulties. Ever since the company abandoned the well.

Niko succeeded in striking the JVA without any competitive tender and in violation of various rules. The then state minister Mosharraf was ousted in mid-2005 for receiving a Tk 1 crore cora from Niko.

The company was disqualified by the government in the Second Round Block Bidding for oil and gas exploration under PSCs in 1997. But it kept on trying to enter Bangladesh's gas sector through the backdoor and finally got access to the sector through a hush-hush joint venture deal with Bapex and also through purchase of shares of an American oil company in Block-9.

Khaleda

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Referring to LDP President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, she said, "He did not do anything for the development of his own constituency of Munshiganj-1 and carried out his political activities like a zamindar."

"I would like to assure you that we will bring enormous development to your area if you vote for four-party," she told the new comers.

The former prime minister said BNP wants the people of all faiths to live side by side peacefully in Bangladesh enjoying equal rights and dignity by making the country a prosperous one through educating the people.

Alleging AL of repressing the Hindus when it was in power, she said BNP carried out various development activities for the people of all faiths including the Hindu community when it was in power.

Describing the development works for the Hindu community in the last five years, Khaleda Zia said some 22,000 puja mandaps were set up across the country during the regime of the immediate past four-party government and arrangements were also made for rebuilding the Kaimandir at Rama.

"Ramadan and puja were simultaneously held and celebrated peacefully during our rule, which is a unique example of communal harmony in Bangladesh," she said adding that BNP does not believe in majority or minority as it believes that all citizens are Bangladeshis.

Presided over by Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, a BNP ticket aspirant from Munshiganj-1, Joint Secretary General of the party Aman Ullah Aman, Goutam Chakraborty and Nitai Roy also addressed the ceremony.

Rajuk starts

FROM PAGE 1
of the lake.

Rajuk had previously demarcated the same stretch of the lake's bank with large tree trunks leaving space between the lake and the proposed walkway. Residents there said they were amazed Rajuk was again spending money to encroach on the lake for the walkway.

"They have already demarcated a wide area for the walkway on the bank of the lake. The plot-sized areas now make it evident as to why they are encroaching upon the lake," said Nurul Islam, a resident of Kalachandpur.

Emdadul Islam, Rajuk's chief engineer, yesterday stated over the telephone that he had asked Uzzal Mallick to stop the re-demarcation work. He also said that re-demarcation would not resume until the matter had been investigated.

Rajuk has previously filled in large stretches of Gulshan lake that were later converted into plots and secretly allocated to influential persons.

The walkway project was initially undertaken to demarcate the lake and thus prevent the lake's water body from encroachment.

Accused lawyers

FROM PAGE 16
Kawsar would be lawyer surety while Advocate Abdullah Abu local surety.

Earlier on December 4 and 5, Barrister Omar Sadat and Supreme Court (SC) authorities brought the sedition charges separately against around 200 lawyers for the November 30 vandalism on the Supreme Court premises.

On December 10, a High Court (HC) bench granted ad interim anticipatory bail for six months to seven SC lawyers, including Barrister Amir-Ul Islam and Barrister Rakanuddin Mahmud, in two separate sedition cases.

At a later hearing, Barrister Tania Amir obtained bail.

The vandalism took place following the stay orders by the chief justice upon public interest writ petitions minutes before giving a rule by a High Court division bench.

Leaders of Awami League-led 14-party combine and some other parties filed the writ petitions challenging the legality of the president's assuming the office of the chief adviser to the caretaker government.

14-party

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said declaring the election schedule and holding polls before publishing the final voter roll are unconstitutional.

As per the previous election schedule, the last date for filing nomination papers was today. But, the Election Commission yesterday extended the date for nomination filing to December 24 keeping January 22 election day unchanged.

The hajj pilgrims carrying transports, ambulances, newspaper vehicles, drug stores, garbage carrying vehicles and other emergency vehicles will remain outside the purview of today's shutdown.

The 14-party combine and Jatiya Party (Ershad) have taken all out preparations to make today's hartal a success while the activists will demonstrate at some 40 spots in the capital in support of the hartal.

The hajj pilgrims carrying transports, ambulances, newspaper vehicles, drug stores, garbage carrying vehicles and other emergency vehicles will remain outside the purview of the hartal.

Right to pick honest

FROM PAGE 1
some vital information about the poll candidates.

Prof Muzaffer Ahmad, Shujan chief, in his introductory speech said the qualitative change that was enhanced through the May 24, 2005 HC verdict on people's right to know has now been undermined.

Dr Badiul Alam Majumdar, Shujan secretary, posed a question, "Will it not make the criminalised politics more vile?"

Over the immediate implementation of the stay order, former adviser to caretaker government Hafizuddin Khan said the EC might look after a certain quarter's interest. It was a "dilly-dally body earlier, now it seems over prompt".

Syed Abul Maqsood, eminent columnist, asked, "Does the state machinery assist the black money holders and criminals, harming the rights of people?"

Badiul Alam Majumdar said Abu Safa, according to Shujan investigation, who filed the appeal against the HC verdict, is not at all a philanthropic nomination seeker; rather he abandoned his wife and two children at Kalapahia village in Sandwip. His family sources said he is now staying with his second wife at Tongi and working with a shop at Cherag Ali market there. But Safa could not be traced in Tongi.

Though Safa in his petition raised objection to disclosing the academic qualification, the Supreme Court (SC) stayed all the eight points of the HC verdict, Shujan leaders said.

Meanwhile, at another press conference at the second hall of the SCBA, the three writ petitioners advocates Abdul Momen Chowdhury, KM Zahir and Mohammad Zahurul Islam submitted caveat to the advocate-on-record, Syed Mahabubur Rahman, to contest the case at the SC Appellate Division.

They said the hearing was held without letting the advocate-on-record get informed and in presence of BNP leader and former law minister

Barrister Moudud Ahmed and Barrister Omar Sadat, son-in-law of another BNP minister Shahjahan Siraj.

Abdul Momen Chowdhury, one of the writ petitioners, alleged Moudud acted behind the scene while Omar moved the matter in the Appellate Division.

"If we were informed through the advocate-on-record, the SC after proper hearing might not issue stay on that public interest case," he said.

11 western

FROM PAGE 1
minister M Morshed Khan said the foreign envoys wanted to know about the constitutional process and the meeting discussed the extent of the constitutional obligation to hold the election within 90 days. "We heard their opinion and we expressed ours," he said.

Asked if the envoys were in favour of deferring the election, Morshed said, "Neither they asked to defer nor they asked to advance the election date. They said it's the matter of Bangladesh into which they won't poke their nose."

He said the diplomats want to see Bangladesh marching forward under a constitutional system.

Terming the 90-minute meeting informal, Morshed said this sort of meeting will be held regularly.

BNP standing committee member Khandaker Mahbul Uddin Ahmed, BNP Chairperson's another adviser Reaz Rahman, former state minister Mir Nasiruddin and BNP Office Secretary Nazrul Islam Khan were also present at the meeting.

Apart from the UNDP country representative and the British high commissioner, ambassadors of the European Commission, Germany, Australia, Canada, France, Italy, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland and Denmark attended the meeting.

Latest proposal

FROM PAGE 1
"Conspiracies are still on. Instead of implementing the entire package proposal, the caretaker government has taken a piecemeal approach only to hold a farcical election conspiring to destroy the democratic process."

In the original package proposal, the CG proposed that Zakaria and newly appointed Election Commissioner Modabbar Hossain Chowdhury would be sent on leaves of absence and three new commissioners would be appointed, he said.

"We have learnt that the caretaker government will only send Zakaria on a leave. But we know nothing about when will he be sent on a leave?" said the AL leader adding that the Chief Adviser (CA) Iajuddin Ahmed-led CG has failed to create a congenial atmosphere for a fair election.

"We have learnt that the caretaker government will only send Zakaria on a leave. But we know nothing about when will he be sent on a leave?" said the AL leader adding that the Chief Adviser (CA) Iajuddin Ahmed-led CG has failed to create a congenial atmosphere for a fair election.

The AL leader reiterated his demand that Iajuddin steps down from the post of CA and appoints a non-partisan person to the post, cancels the current poll schedule, reconstitutes the Election Commission through removal of all controversial persons in it, changes all election officials in the EC secretariat and in the election offices in districts and upazilas, corrects and publishes the updated voter roll, depoliticises the administration, announces a fresh poll schedule after publishing the corrected voter list and implements the package deal in its entirety.

None of the demands has been met yet which are prerequisites for holding a free and fair election, Jaiil added.

On December 10, a High Court (HC) bench granted ad interim anticipatory bail for six months to seven SC lawyers, including Barrister Amir-Ul Islam and Barrister Rakanuddin Mahmud, in two separate sedition cases.

At a later hearing, Barrister Tania Amir obtained bail. The vandalism took place following the stay orders by the chief justice upon public interest writ petitions minutes before giving a rule by a High Court division bench.