

Grand alliance

FROM PAGE 1
Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) will contest in four constituencies, Gono Forum in three and Workers Party in four constituencies under the auspices of the grand electoral alliance.

According to the primary decision JSD will contest in Kustia-6, Chittagong-10, Panchagarh-1 and Sunamganj-4 constituencies while Gono Forum will contest in Cox's Bazar-1, Dhaka-3 and Manikganj-3, and Workers Party will contest in Barisal-2, Rajshahi-2 and also in a constituency in Shatkhira district.

Zaker Party will contest in Faridpur-4 and Islami Oikkyo Jote will contest in Narail-2.

AL is also continuing its discussion with Jana Sanghati Samity, and Krishok Samrak Janata League to bring them into the fold of its grand alliance based on similar seat sharing.

Sources said during almost two-hour long discussion Sheikh Hasina and HM Ershad finalised around 35 constituencies for JP to contest in and decided to continue their discussion on seat sharing as JP top leaders placed demands for a few more seats.

However, they failed to reach a decision regarding what constituency Ershad's dissident wife, Roushan Ershad, will contest in.

According to the sources, Ershad wanted two seats for his wife but Sheikh Hasina wants to give Roushan only one. JP leaders said they will talk again with the AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil on Friday night.

The two leaders also discussed the matter of forming the next government if the people vote them to power, the sources added.

Ershad, however, drove away being accompanied by JP leader Anisul Islam Mahmud, without briefing reporters on the upshot of the meeting that ended at 11:00am.

Poll observers

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conduct and punishing those who break it."

The former adviser was speaking at the inauguration ceremony of a two-day foundation workshop and training for election observers organised by Brotee at the Biam auditorium. The project is being supported by the Royal Netherlands Embassy.

Although the government is primarily responsible for ensuring a free and fair election, Hafiz said the election observers must play a role to make the government accountable to this task.

He also stressed the need for polls observers' being neutral and transparent not only in their work, but also in the manner they present themselves to the public while on duty.

Brotee Chief Executive Officer Sharmeen Murshid said 30 percent of the 85 organisations in 30 constituencies where Brotee is working to update the voter list have a low or unacceptable standard of work.

"We are willing to train organisations which are willing to correct mistakes and are ignorant of proper procedures," she said.

Hinting at the organisations that deliberately do not correct the mistakes in the voter list, she said Brotee will not train those.

She also observed that the poll monitors are part of the political crisis in Bangladesh as they are also required to incorporate the principles of equity and transparency in their work.

Brotee is training 324 people to take part as monitors in the ninth parliamentary elections.

Human rights

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report said "a hapless ordinary pedestrian may end up in jail for months simply for crossing the road at the wrong time and in the wrong place; namely, where police were present."

Basil Fernando, executive director of AHRG, said extrajudicial killings, often called "en-counter killings" where police shoot down alleged criminals, has been one of the biggest sources of human rights abuses in these countries.

"The right to life in terms of respect for due processes have given way to a very direct form of eliminating people without the normal processes of going through courts," Fernando told Reuters by telephone from his office in Hong Kong.

"It's happening in the Philippines, in India -- by way of encounter killings. One of the worst examples is Sri Lanka where it is happening in many forms," he added.

Sri Lanka, the report said, is the most violent place in Asia at the moment and the state has not taken any serious steps to bring it under control.

"The violence in Sri Lanka that presently afflicts the country has been aggravated by the collapse of the rule of law for a considerable time," the AHRG said.

There is an institutional collapse of the policing system; the judiciary is faced with a serious crisis and the government lacks the capacity to carry out its functions of protection.

In the Philippines, extra-judicial

The former military ruler has been getting renewed public attention since he joined the December 18 grand rally that ended with announcing the formation of the grand electoral alliance.

But, Abdul Jalil told the reporters following the summit that they discussed the latest political situation, strategies for the ongoing movement, and the electoral preparations.

"Nothing is certain. We may or may not participate in the election," Jalil told the reporters when asked about the possibility of them participating in the upcoming election.

He also said, "There will be no election in the country without a flawless voter list," reiterating his grand alliance's demand for a fresh election schedule following scrapping of the current one.

Later, LDP Secretary General Major (ret) Abdul Mannan, Anwar Kabir Talukder and Firoje M Hasan met Abdul Jalil in the evening in his Gulshan residence and discussed seat sharing.

Sources said, during the meeting LDP-led Jatiya Oikya Front (JOF) asked for 60 seats. No decision was taken in the meeting which is to continue, the sources added.

"The grand alliance won't take part in the election under the prevailing situation... We won't take part without a level playing field even if 14-party does," Abdul Mannan told reporters after the meeting.

The sources also said after finalising the list of constituencies for LDP leaders, LDP chief also a former president of the country, AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, might meet AL President Sheikh Hasina to discuss strategies for the grand alliance's ongoing movement.

Guantanamo

FROM PAGE 1
In his forwarding report, Investigation Officer (IO) Sub-Inspector Masud mentioned that Mobarak said he had gone to Pakistan for studies in 1998 and taught in a madrasa in Karachi after completion of his two-year study.

But the IO did not find any documents about his study in Pakistan. So, Mobarak might have a militancy link, the IO said.

Sonia

FROM PAGE 16
The home ministry confirmed in a statement that an advisory had been issued to strengthen security arrangements for "protectees", but said "such advisories are issued regularly and need not give rise to inaccurate or speculative news reporting."

"The Ministry of Home Affairs carries out periodic threat assessment for all its protectees," the statement said.

"A similar exercise was taken in view of the forthcoming festivals, Republic Day functions and assembly elections in four major states."

India celebrates its Republic Day national holiday on January 26.

"On the basis of the threat assessment received an advisory was issued to all concerned to be vigilant and strengthen security arrangements," the statement said.

Intelligence sources told Times of India that Gandhi's security was already raised to the highest level possible in the wake of a series of blasts at a mosque in western Maharashtra state that killed 37 people in September.

"But the media alleged that I was involved in the CNG scam and doing the same still now," he said urging the audience to stand against such allegations.

About allocation of railway land to the BSEHR, he said he applied to the governments of Awami League and Jatiya Party for a piece of land for his organisation to establish a shelter home for the victims of human rights violations, but no government responded.

Established in 1977, BSEHR has now 385 branches across the country and a headquarters was badly needed for it, he noted.

"When my party came to power and I became the communications minister, I applied to the Railway Board for a piece of land for my organisation [BSEHR], but the board suggested me to apply to the prime minister."

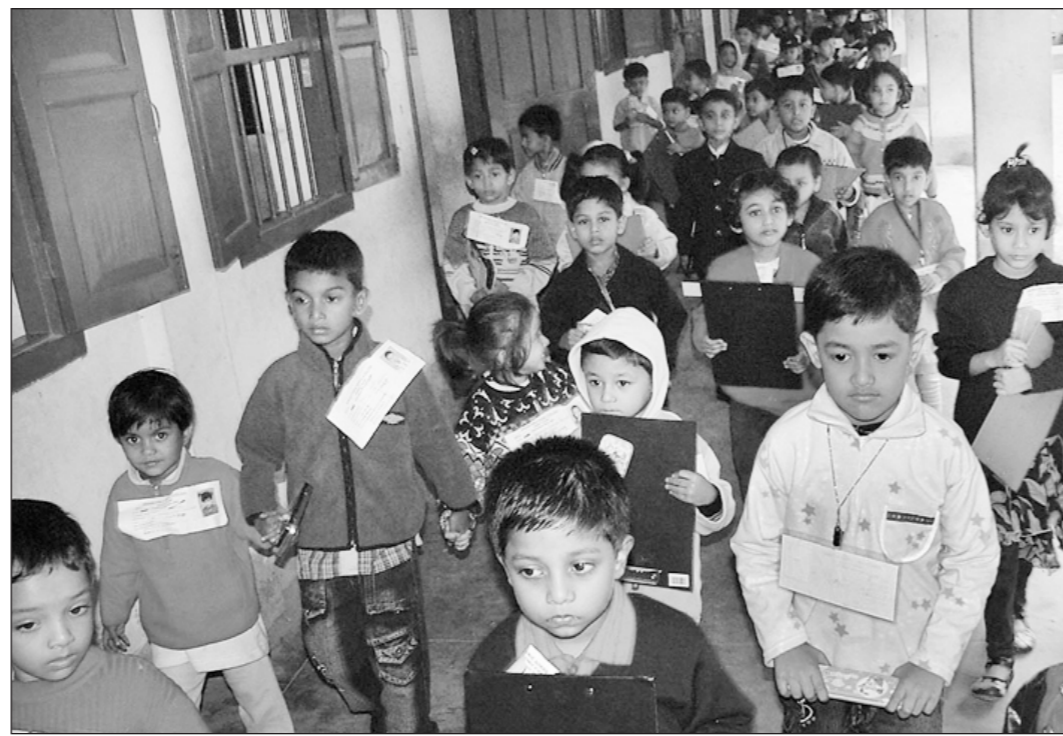
Nazmul Huda said he then applied to the prime minister (PM), who, in reply, said it was not a PM-level job, rather a minister-level job.

"I then allocated a railway land to BSEHR, but the media wrote that I gave the land to my wife Sigma Huda."

Sigma Huda is secretary general of BSEHR.

"This is our media. It is really an unfortunate situation," Nazmul Huda said, adding that he needed to clarify his position on the allegations against him, as his organisation BSEHR has decided to focus on corruption this year.

The senior BNP leader said he is both a political leader and a human rights activist. "I am above partisan character during my human rights activities."



Admission seeking kids enter Chittagong Isphani School as around 2,000 contested for 100 seats at the renowned institution.

Investment

FROM PAGE 16
companies ignoring the national interests and policies on energy.

"International energy companies are working to systematically grab our energy resources and foreign-aided development projects are helping them to achieve their goal," said Prof Anu Muhammad of Department of Geology, Jahangirnagar University.

Talking about the Phulbari coalmine, he said according to the contract signed with Asia Energy, Bangladesh was supposed to get only six percent of the production as royalty while in the original contract, signed with the Australian company BHP, the royalty was 20 percent.

"The coalmine contract was transferred to Asia Energy from BHP in 1998 but no government gazette notifying the people of the matter was published then," he said adding that most of the contracts were signed secretly ignoring national interests.

Eminent economist Prof Muzaffer Ahmed said the demand for energy is increasing tremendously and if the Third World War ever happens, it would probably be over energy and water.

He said a strong institution should be set up immediately to deal with the issues of the energy sector and the first task of the institution will be to formulate a national pro-people and pro-environment energy policy.

Awami League Agriculture Affairs Secretary Dr Abdur Razzak said the BNP-Jamaat alliance government invested around Tk 18,000 crore but failed to produce even a single megawatt of additional electricity in last five years.

Prof Nazrul Islam presented a proposal "Resolution on energy: Towards a pro-people and pro-environment energy strategy for Bangladesh". Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud, Communist Party leader Muzahidul Islam Selim, Prof Badrul Imam, Prof Hossain Mansur, Prof MM Akash, Engineer Sheikh Muhammad Shahidullah, Engineer Nurul Islam, Dr Sarwat Chowdhury, Prof Mahbuba Nasrin and Prof Nim Chandra Bhoumik also spoke at the seminar.

Press reports

FROM PAGE 16
"What can I do if someone sells a CNG-run three wheeler at Tk 10,000 higher cost in the free market economy? Was it a crime to allow import of 10,000 CNG-run three wheelers to make the city pollution-free?" Huda, also chairman of the advisory council of BSEHR, asked.

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Land policy

FROM PAGE 16
Bangladesh: New Horizon of Development."

In his paper, Prof Barkat said the number of landless families has increased three-folds in the last five decades with only 6.2 percent families holding 40 percent of the total land of the country.

Pointing out that 91 million of the 140 million population of the country are poor, he said if the government distributes the khas land among the landless people, every family will get only six percent of the production as royalty while in the original contract, signed with the Australian company BHP, the royalty was 20 percent.

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Charges pressed

FROM PAGE 1
are Rakanuddin Mahmud, Enayetur Rahim, Subrata Chowdhury and Sheikh Awsafur Rahman.

"Apart from the four FIR (first information report)-named accused, nine others have been included in the charge sheet as their involvement in the vandalism was found during investigation," the IO told The Daily Star yesterday.

The SCBA also investigated the incident but did not find involvement of any lawyers.

An eight-member SCBA probe body in its report on December 18 said they talked to 120 SC staff, lawyers and witnesses. But none of them said any lawyer was involved in the vandalism, the report added.

In his complaint, Omar Sadat said Rakan asked the accused lawyers and outsiders to vandalise the chief justice's chamber, court-rooms and other public property, and also to threaten the attorney general.

Metropolitan Magistrate ABM Abdul Fattah later recorded statement of the complainant and directed Shahbagh police to investigate the allegations and register an FIR if those are found true.

On investigation as per the court directive, Shahbagh police registered the complaint as an FIR on December 5.

The vandalism on the SC premises took place after chief justice stayed the proceedings of three writ petitions minutes before a High Court bench was about to issue a rule on a writ challenging the legality of the president's takeover as chief adviser to the caretaker government.

Leaders of the 14-party alliance and other political parties filed the writ petitions which also challenged the chief adviser's activities, and announcement of the schedule for the next general election.

The IO said prosecution witnesses saw outsider Habibur Rahman torching the vehicle of the former state minister for law parked on the SC premises.

Sources said a former state minister, complainant of the case Sadat and another BNP leader monitored the whole process of preparing and submitting the

sacrifice something for the people only when they face tremendous pressure."

Sultana, however, expressed hope, saying, "We common people, who are not in the government, have more power than the government. So, we can force the government to change the state policy."

Citing Prof Rehman Sobhan's study, Dr Mainul Islam of Chittagong University said Prof Sobhan proved after studying 36 developed countries that all those countries brought reforms in their land policies and made them pro-people before developing.

AMA Muhith, former secretary, Dr Zafullah Chowdhury, project coordinator of Gonashastho Kendro, Khushi Kabir, coordinator of Nijera Kari, Sanjeeb Drong, general secretary of Bangladesh Adibashi Forum, Shykh Seraj, director (news) of Channel I, MA Kader, executive director of Samata, Syed Yusuf Hossain, former secretary, also spoke at the seminar.

Shamsul Huda of ALRD delivered the welcome note.

Army men

FROM PAGE 1
Police said Jewel and Hira were arrested on allegations of involvement in criminal activities in the town.

Duty officer of Kurigram Sadar Police Station told this correspondent that the two were being quizzed at the army camp at Kurigram Circuit House.

The deputy commissioner of Kurigram, however, told this correspondent that he knew nothing about army drive in the district town.

He further said the army did not even inform him anything about the arrest of the two.

2 file nominations

FROM PAGE 1
Candidates of the BNP-led four-party alliance are yet to file their nomination papers in any of the eight constituencies except Dhaka-11.

So far, 16 candidates, mostly independent ones, have filed their nomination papers for the constituencies of Dhaka city.

Four-party alliance candidate SA Khaleque submitted his nomination papers for Dhaka-11 constituency on Thursday at Zila Election Office, Agargaon.

However, Abdul Kader Mollah, assistant secretary general of Jamaat-e-Islami, filed his nomination papers for Dhaka-4 constituency. He told The Daily Star last night that he filed the papers as a Jamaat candidate not as a four-party alliance candidate.

Another, Jamaat leader Mir Kashem Ali also filed his nomination papers for Dhaka-11 constituency but he did not reveal his political identity in the papers, said officials of the Returning Officer's (RO's) Office.

Six independent candidates filed their nomination papers for different constituencies of Dhaka city on the first day, December 20. Eight candidates filed their nomination papers on the second day.

Election officials of the RO's Office said the much-expected enthusiasm in submitting nomination papers is still missing as the 14-party alliance is yet to declare whether they would participate in the elections.

3 outlaws

FROM PAGE 1
during the "shootout" and died instantly. The members of the elite force caught one of the gang named Idris, while others managed to flee. Idris was taken into Rab custody for quizzing.

Police said Sabur was wanted in eight cases including three for murder.

In Pabna, PBCP leader Nazrul Islam was killed in an encounter with Rab in Ataikula upazila at about 3:00am, according to our correspondent.

A team of Rab-12, Pabna, raided Shibir village of the upazila on information that some cadres of PBCP Janajuddha faction were holding a meeting at the village.

Sensing the presence of the elite force, the outlawed party men opened fire, forcing the Rab to return fire.

Rab sources said Tufan was shot during the "shootout" and died on the spot, while others fled the scene.

Tufan was an accused in 14 cases including six for murder, the sources said. A sub-machine gun and 40 bullets were recovered from the spot.

Our Sirajganj correspondent adds: PBCP regional leader Razzak Mondol, 42, of Shuborno Shara village in Belkuchi upazila died at Sirajganj General Hospital early yesterday.

Rab-12 personnel arrested Razzak, an accused in two murder cases, at his house at 7:00pm on Thursday and took him to their camp for interrogation.

After quizzing, Razzak was handed over to Belkuchi police at 11:00pm, Rab sources said.

As the outlawed party leader fell sick at the police station, he was rushed to the hospital where he died at around 3:00am yesterday.

Police filed a case.

BNP ticket

FROM PAGE 1
placed railway tracks and set fire to wooden sleepers, said police, locals and railway station sources.

Rail and road communications were disrupted from 8:00am to 2:00pm.

Bajitpur Officer-in-Charge (OC) Monwar Hossain said he with a police team removed barricade on Kishoreganj-Dhaka highway at around 1:30pm and deployed police there.

The news of Mojibur Rahman Monju's getting party nomination angered the supporters of his rival Sheikh Mojibur Rahman Iqbal, Bajitpur upazila Krishak Dal President Abu Taher said.

Mojibur Rahman Monju was the parliament elections with BNP ticket in 2001 and 1996. In 2001 Monju defeated AL candidate Zillur Rahman who was also the then AL general secretary.

But other BNP nomination seekers, who said Monju was accused of corruption and killing a few party leaders, vowed to resist him in several public meetings.

Taher Uddin Tahu, Nikli upazila vice-president of the party, was killed on October 10 this year and the next day Tahu's wife Josna Akter filed a murder case with Bajitpur Police Station accusing the then BNP lawmaker Mojibur Rahman Monju, sources said.

Recently in a public meeting, Monju's rival faction led by Prof Tojazzal Hossain, Sheikh Mojibur Rahman Iqbal and engineer Golam Mohammad formed a committee styled 'Save Bajitpur BNP from Monju'.

Russia seeks delay in Iran sanctions vote

UN resolution won't halt nuclear drive, says Tehran

AFP, United Nations/ Tehran

Russia is pushing for a one-day delay in a planned yesterday vote on a UN resolution sanctioning Iran for pursuing its nuclear programme, diplomats said here.

In a last-minute exercise of brinkmanship diplomacy, envoys of the 15-member council's five veto-wielding members -- Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States -- plus Germany are set to meet early Friday for final negotiations on whether to hold the vote or postpone it.

On Thursday they huddled for what was supposed to be a last bargaining session ahead of the crucial vote.

But Russia's UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin emerged from the meeting, saying he wanted the council vote put off to at least Saturday.

"We believe there should be a postponement (of the vote) to Saturday," he said. "We'll need (Friday) for further discussions."

A Western diplomat close to the talks said that France, Britain and Germany, who sponsored the text, still plan for a Friday vote.

"The Europeans have the decision on this," said US acting Ambassador Alejandro Wolff, hopeful there would still be a Friday vote.

Wolff said the six countries were "getting closer to a final text," but cited lingering "issues we are concerned about," without elaborating.

Asked if the United States would accept a Russian abstention, he replied: "We are hoping for a consensus resolution but we want a tough resolution that will actually demonstrate to Iran that the international community is not going to accept their continued violations of their obligations."

In Washington, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said her government was seeking last-minute changes to the document.

The draft resolution calls for a ban on trade with Iran in goods related to its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes.

It warns that if Tehran refuses to comply with demands that it halt sensitive nuclear fuel work, the Security Council "shall adopt further appropriate measures under Article 41 of Chapter Seven" of the UN charter, a reference to economic sanctions. The draft document slaps financial restrictions on persons and entities involved in proliferation-sensitive nuclear and missile programmes.

Qatar's Ambassador Nasser Abdelaziz al-Nasser, who chairs the council for December, expressed misgivings about sanctions. "We don't know how the Iranians are going to react," he said.

"The Middle East is going through difficult times. We are worried about this matter. We live there," he said.

US navy to control

FROM PAGE 16
outside Baghdad, the crackle of gunfire could be heard in the distance.

Earlier US Defence Secretary left Iraq after striking "a broad strategic agreement" to avert all-out war, as British troops seized Iraqi police accused of carrying out a massacre.

Gates, under massive pressure to come up with a plan to pull Iraq out of chaos and bring 129,000 US troops home, said he would report his findings and impressions to President George W. Bush as early as the weekend.

"This is a very difficult situation," said Gates at the US military headquarters in Iraq after a three-day fact-finding visit, as the crackle of gunfire and roar of military aircraft could be heard in the distance.

"But I believe, based on what I have heard and seen both from American commanders and the Iraqis, that things are moving in a positive direction."

Gates said the embattled Iraqi government had put forward concrete plans to restore security in the war-shattered country, but gave no details. Nor would he say whether sending more US troops to Iraq was part of the plan.

Insurgent and sectarian violence is at an all-time high in Iraq where deadly bombings, shootings and kidnappings claim an average of 100 lives a day.

The defence secretary, who discussed improving security with Iraqi leaders, including Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, said he had been impressed with their understanding of the problems and their eagerness to take charge.

"We've talked with the Iraqis about the best path forward in terms of improving the security situation here in Baghdad."

"And I think we have a broad strategic agreement between the Iraqi military, and the Iraqi government and our military," he said.

But Iraqi-US cracks were only too apparent over attempts from the Maliki administration to woo radical anti-American cleric Moqtada al-Sadr's movement back into the unity coalition, despite US attempts to sideline him.

US officials have made it clear that they favour a realignment in Iraq's unity government, which would exclude Sadr and his Shia militia, with the violence of Iraq's vicious sectarian war at an all time high.

Last month, Sadr appeared to have helped US officials angling for an end to his influence by withdrawing his 32 MPs and six ministers from the coalition in protest at Maliki's decision to meet Bush for crisis talks in Jordan.

But this week Iraqi politicians tramped down to the Shia holy city of Najaf to talk to Sadr's allies and encourage him back into the coalition.

"The Shia coalition has put in

Churkin said he offered suggestions about how to ensure that the proposed sanctions target only prohibited sectors, such as Iran's enrichment-related and reprocessing activities.

To overcome Russian objections, the sponsors Wednesday watered down a contentious proposal for a travel ban on 12 officials directly linked to Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes.

But Ch