

The Daily Star

on Friday

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Talking soft over talks

By Nazmul Ashraf and Rezaul Karim

The Opposition has asked the government to create "an atmosphere conducive to negotiation" in the wake of a ruling party proposal for a dialogue aimed at ensuring all parties' participation in the upcoming upazila and city corporation polls.

BNP says the government is not sincere about it, alleging that there has not been any "formal and specific" offer.

"We did not find their proposal a concrete and sincere one... We can only consider a specific proposal for dialogue and it can take place only when the government creates a conducive atmosphere for it," BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said yesterday.

Government leaders only contacted their BNP counterparts to make the offer for discussions.

The latest remarks from the BNP leader represent a softening stand as the party had been demanding scrapping of municipal polls results as a precondition to any dialogue.

BNP's partners in the four-party opposition combine bluntly refuse to entertain the plea for talks. Until yesterday,

they found no reason to respond to the government invitation.

On Monday, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina talked to two BNP heavyweights -- former finance minister M. Saifur Rahman and party secretary Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan -- at the Bangabhaban during a banquet hosted by the President for the D-8 summiters.

The following day, Telecommunications Minister Mohammad Nasim phoned Bhuiyan to invite the BNP to a dialogue.

Bhuiyan described it as a "courtesy" phone call. "Nasim wanted to know if something can be done to end the government-opposition conflict. I then insisted that the government accept our demands and create an atmosphere for talks," he told a group of reporters at the Opposition leader's Minto Road official residence yesterday evening.

Meanwhile, diplomatic pressures are mounting on both sides to go for a negotiated settlement of the political standoff, which may have forced the government to propose for a dialogue and the BNP to demand only "the creation of an atmosphere" for it.

US assistant secretary of state for South Asian Affairs Karl Inderfurth made a statement in Washington on Wednesday, calling upon the Bangladesh political leaders to "find peaceful means to resolve their differences."

"Accommodation, not confrontation, is essential for economic growth and prosperity," Inderfurth told the House of International Relations Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific.

The same day, the European Union, an important development partner of Bangladesh, expressed serious concerns about the country's deteriorating political situation. "If political violence and intolerance should continue, foreign trade and investment will be negatively affected and collaboration in development will necessarily suffer to the detriment of all," said an EU statement released in Germany, the current chair of the 15-nation Brussels-based grouping.

The EU also urged all political parties to resolve their differences in Parliament and "through other legitimate ways."

The BNP leader "fully endorsed" the EU statement but said "solution to the current crisis is not enough, consensus on some vital national issues is essential to restore the political stability in the country."

In this regard, he accused the government of continuing repression on the Opposition. "The government will have to shun the politics of confrontation and practise tolerance and democracy."

BNP's shifting emphasis is further explained by its focus on stopping "large-scale repression on BNP activists and political cases", which is far from the key issue of the February 23-25 municipal polls the opposition parties boycotted.

Bhuiyan also said he blamed the AL leader for "tactfully" keeping the BNP out of the municipal elections.

Nasim has also confirmed that Bhuiyan raised the issue of "increasing number of political cases against the partymen". The AL leader said he requested the BNP leader to submit a list of such cases for consideration of the government.

But Bhuiyan remains unconvinced saying such lists

given in the past did not produce any results.

Asked on the government offer, Jatiya Party president member Kazi Firoz Rashid told The Daily Star that his party did not get any such proposal. But he said his party was determined not to go for any talks unless the municipal polls were annulled. The JP leader termed the government move "simply a political stunt".

Jamaat-e-Islami leader ATM Azharul Islam declined to comment on the issue as, he said, his party was ignorant of the move.

BNP sources said the party secretary general came under criticism for talking to the AL emissary. Some of the party leaders advised the secretary not to talk to anybody, other than his counterpart, in the ruling party.

Meanwhile, the opposition liaison committee is due to meet this afternoon to discuss their new course of action. "The committee is unlikely to go for tough street agitation in the current month as the nearly month-long SSC examinations began yesterday," a liaison committee member said.

Garst is now ours

US founder of
RIHD made
hon. citizen

The government has conferred honorary citizenship on US physician Dr Ronald J Garst for his outstanding service to the distressed humanity, reports UNB.

Home Secretary Shafur Rahman formally awarded the citizenship and handed over Bangladesh Passport to him at a function at his office yesterday.

Dr Garst came here in 1972 at the call of Bangabandhu to treat the injured freedom fighters.

Initially, he treated the freedom fighters at the Shaheed Suhrawardi Hospital. Later, he set up the Pongu Hospital and Rehabilitation Centre with the active cooperation of Bangladesh.

He became the first honorary project director of the hospital and served till 1981 taking only Tk one as honorarium from the Bangladesh government.



Honouring a friend
Dr Garst being presented with a crest at the Mukti Jodha Kalyan Trust yesterday
— Star Photo: AKM Mohsin

Hasina puts repatriation on the table

Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif yesterday requested Bangladesh to launch a joint appeal to the international world, particularly the Muslim countries, to provide funds for the repatriation of stranded Pakistanis here, reports UNB.

The process of repatriation is very expensive and it requires some 400 million US dollars, he said while requesting Bangladesh Prime Minister

Sheikh Hasina for the joint appeal with Pakistan for funds.

Prior to his departure for Pakistan in the afternoon, Sharif had talks with Hasina at the VVIP lounge of Zia International Airport.

During the informal talks for over an hour, the two leaders discussed various bilateral issues, including the repatriation of some 250,000 stranded Pakistanis.

The long-standing repatriation

issue that came up for discussion had yielded some positive results, officials present during the meeting later told newsmen.

Hasina, raising the issue of repatriation of the stranded Pakistanis, said the matter is pending for a long time and has become a humanitarian concern.

Bangladesh with its limited resources cannot go on support-

ing them for indefinite period, she said.

Sharif recalled his earlier efforts on the issue when he was Prime Minister of Pakistan in 1991-92 and said that as a result some stranded Pakistanis were repatriated.

He informed that the government of Pakistan had appointed a commissioner to deal with the subject. Twelve districts of Punjab have been earmarked for settlement of the

stranded Pakistanis, he said, adding, some houses have also been constructed for them.

Hasina mentioned to her Pakistani counterpart the adverse balance Bangladesh has been facing for several years in the field of bilateral trade.

In 1997-98 Bangladesh imported goods worth 80.20 million US dollars from Pakistan while its export was 44.77 million dollars, she said.

Sinha heads for BGMEA victory

By Monjur Mahmud

Anisur Rahman Sinha was set to become the next BGMEA president as all 27 candidates from his panel were leading convincingly, according to reports available till midnight last night.

Results from more than 1100 votes so far tabulated out of 1896 showed the Sinha-led panel was heading for a landslide, BGMEA sources said.

According to one source, the Sinha-backed candidates got 611 panel votes and the oppo-

nents led by the incumbent president won 405.

The final results of the elections were expected after completion of counting of votes early this morning.

Voting took place yesterday simultaneously in Dhaka and Chittagong to elect a new 27-member executive committee of BGMEA or Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association for a two-year term.

Some 1,886 voters, more

than 94 per cent of the total 1,992, cast their ballots.

Professor Ali Ashraf, MP, the head of the Election Board, told reporters that the 9am-5pm polling ended peacefully.

The joint panel of Forum Sammilita Parishad led by Anisur Rahman Sinha and Nurul Haq Sikder was pitted against the Sammilita Parishad led by Mostafa Culum Qudus, the incumbent president of BGMEA.

শুভ উদ্বোধন হলো

সীমেন্স-এর সর্বাধুনিক প্রযুক্তি আর বিশ্বমানের দক্ষতা নিয়ে
ইবনে সিনা মেডিকেল ইমেজিং সেন্টার

যে প্রযুক্তি, যে দক্ষতা ইউরোপের জন্যও নতুন
বাংলাদেশের জন্য এক নতুন যুগের সূচনা...

সর্বাধুনিক প্রযুক্তি এর স্বাস্থ্য খাত

- ☐ এক্স-রে স্ক্যান
- ☐ স্বাস্থ্য পরীক্ষার যন্ত্র
- ☐ ইলেক্ট্রিক্যাল প্রযুক্তি
- ☐ স্বাস্থ্য খাতের যন্ত্র

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- ☐ স্বাস্থ্য খাতের যন্ত্র

সুতরাং টাকা খরচ করে বিদেশে নয়
ইবনে সিনা মেডিকেল ইমেজিং সেন্টার... দেশেই সঠিক রোগ নির্ণয়

সকল লাভ মানব সেবায় ব্যয় হয়

ইবনে সিনা মেডিকেল ইমেজিং সেন্টার
বাড়ী নং ৫৮, সড়ক নং ২/এ, ধানমন্ডি আ/এ,
ঢাকা ১২০৯, ফোন : ৮৮০-২-৮৬৮০০৭, ৮৬০৪২০

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MARCH 12 1999

Friday 12 1999
3:00pm to 8:00pm
Gate will open at 12:00 noon.

@ Gulshan Park

(Behind Wonderland)

TICKET INFORMATION

300 Taka each (including VAT) *Available from March 5 at: *Hot Hut (Sobhanbag) *Big Bite (near Eastern Plaza) *Golpea Burger (Baily Road/Gulshan) *La Bamba (Sat Masjid Road/Uttara) *Oven Fresh (Gulshan) *Arabian Fast Food (Dhanmondi 5) *Swiss Plus (Baily Road) *American Fried Chicken (Gulshan) *Sausy's (Dhanmondi/Gulshan) *Arlequin (Sobhanbag) *Hallmark (Gulshan) *Film Fair (Dhanmondi)

No one under 18 years will be admitted

All proceeds from the ticket sales will go to Sandhani National Eye Donation Society and Theatre School.

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