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Consensus, direct polls keys to involve more women in politics

By DU Correspondent

Speakers at a dialogue in the city yesterday called for a consensus among the major political parties to ensure that more women get involved in national politics.

They were of the view that nothing would be more effective in serving the purpose than arranging direct election for women in national and local elections.

The discussants also emphasised 'strong and effective' role of various women organisations to mobilise public opinion in favour of the issue and create pressure on the political parties to pass a bill on it.

At a dialogue on 'Political Participation of Women in Bangladesh: The Issue of Constitution', the speakers urged the ruling and opposition parties to take necessary initiatives to pass a bill so that the women can be elected directly in future.

South Asia Partnership-Bangladesh (SAP-Bangladesh) organised the dialogue in association with Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) at the BRAC Centre yesterday afternoon.

Economists, political leaders, university teachers and NGO representatives attended

the dialogue, moderated by CPD chairman Professor Rehman Sobhan.

Addressing the dialogue as chief guest, Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Abdul Matin Khasru said the government was ready to accept any bill or proposal for empowerment of women either by increasing the 30 reserved seats in Jatiya Sangsad or by electing them directly.

He said the Cabinet has already approved a bill for extending 30 reserved seats for 10 more years. 'The bill will be placed in the forthcoming parliament session scheduled for January', Khasru said adding if necessary the bill would be modified.

Dubbing the bill 'very crucial and timely', he said either the number of reserved seat for women should be increased or steps to elect them directly be taken because they not only represent half the population of the country, but also half the voters.

The law minister however said nothing could be done in this regard if the opposition refrains from attending parliament session. He urged various women organisations to launch

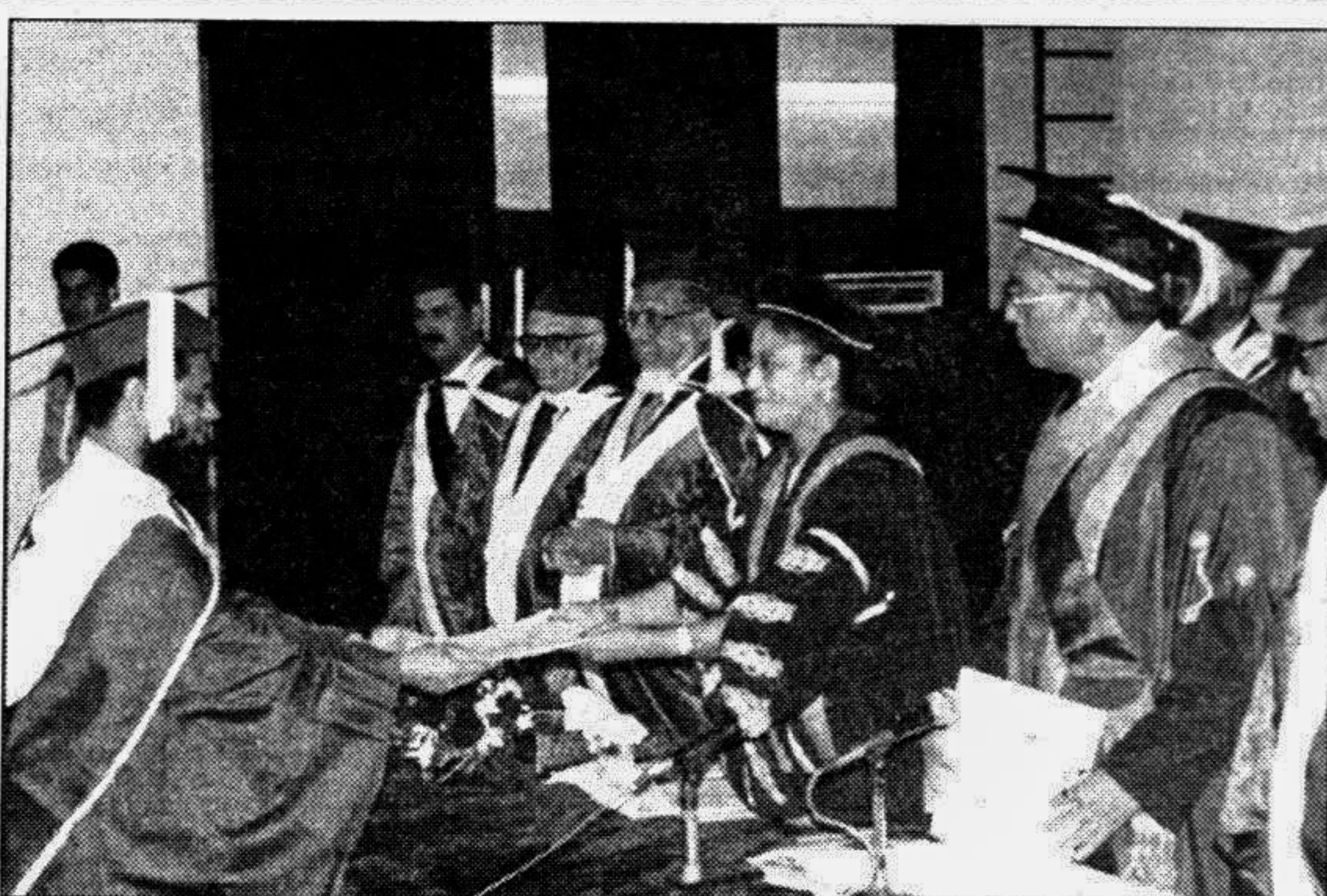
vigorous campaign involving all walks of people to realise their demands.

In his concluding speech, Professor Rehman Sobhan asked the women organisations to make a concrete proposal to increase reserved seats for women or for their direct election to ensure participation of more women in national politics.

He said there should not be differences among the political leaders on this crucial political issue.

In her key-note paper, Prof. Zerina Rahman Khan of Public Administration department of Dhaka University suggested a parliamentary committee for initiating discussion among the parties in parliament on the issue and formulation of a draft proposal.

Among others, executive director of SAP-Bangladesh Syed Nurul Islam, Maleka Begum, Khushi Kabir, Dr Debopriya Bhattacharya, Rukhsana Khondaker, Shirin Akhter, Farida Rahman, Dr Meghna Guha Thakurata, BN Rasheda, Rokeya Khatun also took part at the dialogue.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina distributing certificates among the students of the Islamic Institute of Technology (IIT) at the convocation ceremony '99 in Gazipur yesterday. — PID photo

Cop allegedly snatches money, kills victim

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Nov 22: A young man was shot dead allegedly by police when he tried to get back the money the policemen had snatched from him at Kanaidra village here today.

Angry villagers detained the policemen — a havalidar and four constables — from Barsala police outpost on Sylhet Osmany International Airport road.

According to villagers, the policemen went to Kanaidra, some 20 kilometres off the outpost at about 9 am and snatched away cash money worth Tk 1.05 lakh from Samar Ali, 30, son of Masoddar Ali of Mollargan village under Kandiagan union of Sylhet Kotwali thana.

Samar along with his brother was going to the house of a relative at Sujatpur under the same union.

The two along with other villagers seized the policemen.

lagers asked the police personnel to return the money, but the latter refused and threatened to arrest them for 'snuggling'.

When they were trading hot words, some villagers joined in. At one stage police opened fire on them, killing Samar on the spot.

Villagers immediately detained the policemen.

The SP and DC-in-charge rushed to village and rescued the policemen on assurance that action would immediately be taken against the policemen — Havalidar Abdul Jabbar (Number 514), and constable Sukkur Ali (1047), Sajal Dev (1181), Monowar Hossain (1104) and Sangram Bhattacharjee (760).

African students

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Leone, Benin and Gambia received their certificates from him after the departure of the Prime Minister.

Leader of the boycotting students Bousari Djalil and Boubakari Simila told UNB's Gazipur Correspondent that they stayed off the ceremony protesting a comment by the Director General of the Institute and demanding an international administration and teaching staff.

No negligence or partiality will be tolerated: CEC

Taking a tough stand for ensuring free and fair voting in the upcoming by-elections, Chief Election Commissioner Mohammad Abu Hena yesterday warned no negligence, partiality or laxity in polling would be tolerated, reports UNB.

'As per law instant action would be taken against officers concerned if they failed to perform their responsibilities,' said the CEC whose commission has suspended four magistrates and four presiding officers on charges of negligence of duty during Tangail by-polls held on November 15.

Presiding over a meeting on law and order ahead of three by-elections the Chief Election Commissioner noted that all concerned officers would have to discharge their duties with efficiency maintaining neutrality to ensure a free and fair voting.

By-election to Rajshahi-5, Sirajganj-7 and Kishoreganj-1 parliamentary seats is scheduled for December 8.

The meeting discussed in detail ways to maintain law and order, steps to be taken for all to follow the electoral rules and regulations, security at the polling centres and ensuring security by the mobile teams in the election areas.

Held at the Election Commission office, the meeting was attended by Election Commissioners Abidur Rahman and Mustaq Ahmed Chowdhury, Home Secretary, Secretary of the Election Commission Secretariat, IGP, Director General of Ansars-VDP, Deputy Director General of BDR, chiefs of intelligence agencies, Commissioners and DGs of Dhaka and Rajshahi divisions, deputy commissioners and SPs of Rajshahi, Sirajganj and Kishoreganj and other officials concerned.

The Chief Election Commissioner issued orders for local administrations and law-enforcing agencies to take steps to ensure foolproof security at the polling centres so that voters could freely cast their vote.

Abu Hena sought cooperation of political parties, alliances, candidates, workers and all citizens in discharge of the constitutional duties of the Election Commission.

11 independent candidates demand cancellation of Tangail by-polls

Charging the ruling party and government officials with widespread rigging, 11 independent candidates demanded immediate cancellation of the Tangail by-election, reports UNB.

Otherwise, they warned, they would launch a movement and finally go to the courts.

They were holding a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

In a written statement they also described how the government and its machinery allegedly influenced the election process.

Their allegations are: Appointment of Mollah Wahiduzzaman, an official known as personally loyal to Agriculture Minister Begum Matia Chowdhury, deputy commissioner to make him the returning officer.

Use of the office of additional district magistrate, a relative of Awami League MP Mirza Azam, as the election officer of the ruling party candidate. Issuance of polling agent cards only to ruling party candidate.

Engaging Awami League activists from across the country as ansar and VDP by providing them with uniforms to conduct massive rigging. Bringing ministers and MPs who are experts in rigging and vote dacoity in the area.

They said they took part in the by-poll to prove that no elections under this government would be free, fair and impartial.

'Now it has been proved a farcical election,' their joint statement said.

The press conference was called by 19 independent candidates. Of them, A Enayet, M Ibrahim, M Shahidur Rahman Khan, M A Gafur Bir Protik, M Fazlul Karim, M Nurul Islam, S M Anwar Hossain, M A Mottaleb, Akbar Siddiqui, Abdul Halim and Ansar Ali were present.

Jessore-Benapole train service resumes today

BENAPOLE, Nov 22: The train service on Jessore-Benapole route will resume tomorrow after 25 years, reports BSS.

Communications Minister Anwar Hussain will inaugurate the service at Benapole point. Local MPs and senior railway officials will attend the function, railway sources said here today.

The residents of Jessore, Benapole and its adjoining areas will be benefited with the resumption of the service.

The railway authorities will put into operation a pair of trains named 'Benapole Commuter' initially.

'Work together to abolish gender disparity'

By Staff Correspondent

Speakers at a discussion meeting in the city yesterday called upon all to work together to eliminate gender disparity for development of the country.

Planning Consultation on the World Bank's Gender Strategy for Bangladesh was organised by World Bank and held at the CIRPAD auditorium.

WB Resident Representative Frederick T. Temple was the chief guest at the discussion, participated by, among others, former advisor in caretaker government and Dhaka University teacher Prof Nazma Chowdhury and Nilufar Ahmed, an official at the WB mission here.

Temple emphasised the need

for eliminating disparity between man and woman for development of the country.

Ensuring equal benefit for man and women from development projects is important for poverty reduction and sustainable economic growth, he said. This is important also from the perspective of human rights and wellbeing for all, he added.

Nilufar Ahmed said, after identifying the areas of gender disparity, all concerned should jointly prepare programmes and implement those to remove it.

Earlier, rich tributes were paid to the memory of poet Sufia Kamal for her outstanding contribution in different fields.

Panna Murder Case PWs say they witnessed Shikdar firing shots

From Quazi Amanullah

KHULNA, Nov 22: Three more prosecution witnesses in Panna Murder Case were cross-examined for the second day today in the Additional District and Sessions Judge's Court.

Today's prosecution witnesses were Anisur Rahman, Lutfar Rahman and Ainal Shikdar.

On Sunday, four prosecution witnesses were cross-examined. They are: Nurul Islam, Razia Khatun, Zulfiqar and Jainal. The remaining 19 prosecution witnesses will be examined from tomorrow.

There are seven accused in Panna Murder Case. They are: Ershad Shikdar, Iddris Ali, Jalil Mollah, Motiar Rahman, 'Fancy' Alam, Jamal Faruk and Maktar Hossain. Three out of the seven accused are still absconding.

All the seven (out of 26) prosecution witnesses cross-examined so far by the court in their deposition blamed the accused

for murdering Panna at about 11:30 pm on October 16, 1997 at Zorahate under Khalishpur thana. All of them told the court that they had seen Ershad Shikdar firing shots from a sawn-off gun from close range.

Panna, a member of Ansar department, succumbed on way to Dhaka while being taken there for treatment.

The judge was Shamsul Arefin and the prosecution was led by Public Prosecutor Advocate Kazi Abdus Salam, Advocate Nasiruddin, Kamrul Ahsan and Rajab Ali, all APPs, assisted.

The three absconding accused were defended by Advocate Zillur Rahman Khan, Advocate GM Amanullah defended the accused as state-defence as defence lawyers of Ershad Shikdar and three others refused to cross-examine the witnesses citing reasons that the necessary papers and documents of the case were not supplied to them.

The court will resume hearing of the case for the third day tomorrow.

Ershad Shikdar will also go on trial tomorrow in the court of another Additional District and Sessions' Judge, said a court source today.

Oil distributors, lorry owners on strike in Rajshahi

From Our Correspondent

RAJSHAHI, Nov 22: Rajshahi Division Oil Distributor and Tank Lorry Owners' Association (RODOTLA) today observed strike for the third consecutive day in 16 northern districts.

The distributors and the tank lorry owners have not been lifting oil from the Baghabari Oil Depot from Saturday to press their three-point demand.

The demands include — fixing-up of same price oil rate in all depots of the country, deployment of army and BDR personnel at the Baghabari Depot and stoppage of 'illegal' activities of the Baghabari-based tank lorry workers' associations.

Meanwhile, sufferings of the people in the northern region have mounted due to the strike as prices of all kinds of fuel oils have risen.

Owners of the private commercial motor vehicles are charging higher fares from the passengers in different routes in the region.

Some unscrupulous traders and dealers are selling oil in the black markets at higher prices.

Kabir murder Business partner arrested

By Staff Correspondent

A business partner of engineer Humayun Kabir was arrested late Sunday night for his alleged involvement in the murder of Kabir, police said.

Kabir was shot dead by a gang on Central Road in the city at about 9 pm on Sunday.

The arrested was identified as Faisal Kabir, who along with Humayun Kabir was running a petrol pump at Los Angeles, US. They were green card holders in that country and came to Bangladesh recently, police added.

Faisal was produced before the CMM's court yesterday.

Washington to back

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'We are maintaining a very good and friendly relationship with USA since our independence as our development partner,' the minister said, expressing his satisfaction over US interest to resolve the problems arising out of the GATT agreement through the Uruguay-round trade negotiations.

According to the letter, the USA would seek a summary assessment of the Uruguay-round agreement. USA will also propose mid-term reviews on progress achieved in implementation of the agreement as well as to review the aftereffects of implementation of the clauses of the agreement involving the third world countries.

Holzman said, 'USA has proposed the creation of a working group on trade and labour to examine the issues and its derivatives.'

'We prefer sector-wise approach in the ensuring WTO millennium round. It also proposes to strengthen the WTO and ensure its transparency and accountability,' said the American envoy.

Urging support to the LDC causes, the Commerce and Industries Minister told the US Ambassador that the main agenda of the least developed countries would be to achieve duty-free access to the export markets on non-reciprocal basis.

Besides, the LDCs will give stress on having more technical assistance for capacity building,' he said, adding that the Third World countries would also demand free flow of labour across the globe, as of capital.

He said the LDCs, including Bangladesh, was not against the new round of the discussions but stressed starting with assessing results of the earlier round.

'We'll specially seek to assess the progress of implementation

of the previous commitments favouring the LDCs.'

The minister noted that as the LDCs had been marginalised greatly by the Uruguay-round agreement, the rich nations should first start implementing the commitments yet to be fulfilled.

Referring a lengthy discussion round in future, the minister said the new discussions should be completed in three years. 'Otherwise the LDCs will get more marginalised.'

Tofal requested the USA to accept Bangladesh's initiative to get deferment of the implementation of the Multi-fiber Agreement by five years after 2004.

'Either you allow GSP in garments or allow quota up to 2009,' the minister said mooting the proposal.

However, he hoped for arriving at a consensus at Seattle meeting on stopping further marginalisation of the LDC nations, including Bangladesh.

'We are close to the US proposals and we are hopeful about arriving at a consensus.'

Processions

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processions separately tomorrow.

The BNP will hold rallies and bring out torch processions from 11 places in the capital city while the JP programme will be held at Muktangan. The Jamaat rally will be held at the north gate of Baitul Mukarram and IOJ meeting at Purana Paltan.

In separate statements, leaders of the parties have instructed respective party activists to make tomorrow's programmes a success and observe the hartal on Thursday.

They also urged the countrymen to expedite the current one-point movement by observing the hartal spontaneously.

President's query

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dent that in the naked eyes I did not see any scope for the EC to constitute any probe body for resolving election dispute,' Chakrabarti told The Daily Star yesterday morning.

The Representation of Public Opinion 1972 that deals with the ways of conducting polls suggests that the Election Tribunals are there to resolve any such disputes.'

However, Chakrabarti is to meet the President again to give his final views. The law secretary had a discussion on the presidential queries with the CEC at the latter's office yesterday afternoon. During the discussion, the CEC defended his position and said that the commission would go ahead with its decision to conduct the investigation.

The President, himself a former chief justice, is worried about a possible controversy over the integrity of judicial officers — as the probe body findings are bound to dissatisfy either of the political quarters involved, according to press reports.

He has, perhaps, other reasons to be worried as the Constitution does not specifically say anything about the judiciary's role in the electoral process while it has clearly said what role the executive should play.

The Article 126 of the Constitution says: 'It shall be the duty of all executive authorities to assist the Election Commission in the discharge of its functions.'

The EC is however convinced that it has so far not done anything beyond its constitutional and legal jurisdiction.

CEC Mohammad Abu Hena says 'It is the constitutional obligation of the EC to ensure free and fair elections.'

The EC has ordered investigation into the alleged irregularities following media reports of vote rigging, reports of the professional election observer groups and specific complaints lodged with the EC by a major contender in the by-elections,' the CEC said. 'The incidents have created a general impression to the people that something had been wrong in some polling stations.'

Under such circumstances, the EC believes that it was its responsibility to give certain 'consequential orders' which it did by withdrawing one TNO, cancelling votes of certain centres and ordering a probe into the allegations.

Abu Hena quoted Clause 91 (C) of the Peoples Representation Order, 1972 that deals with the ways of conducting polls. 'The Commission may issue such instruction and exercise such powers, and make such consequential orders as may, in its opinion, be necessary for ensuring that an election is conducted impartially, justly and fairly, and in accordance with the provisions of this Order and the rules.'

The EC also put forward a High Court observation, made by Justice Anwarul Haque Chowdhury, while giving judgement in a case — Afzal Hossain vs Chief Election Commissioner and others — in 1992.

Interpreting a relevant article (119) of the Constitution, Justice Chowdhury said: 'The Election Commission has overall control in election matters and it shall be competent to correct an apparent illegality or to remove mass apprehension for the sake of fair elections.'

Arguing that the EC had no scope for going beyond the framework of the law, Justice Chowdhury further said, '...but when the law is silent, not ex-

pressly providing a thing to be done or not to be done, the Election Commission has plenary power to act under Article 119 of the Constitution which is the reservoir of power for the Election Commission to act for the onward purpose of ensuring free, fair and impartial election with expedition.'

The CEC said, 'You just cannot cancel an election on receipt of certain allegations of irregularities. In the same manner, you just cannot gazette an election results when various quarters including a major contender comes up with serious allegations.' 'In both the cases, you have to conduct investigations.'

As regards the proposal for inducting three judges into the probe body, the CEC said: 'We have not inducted them into the probe body. We believe the judges enjoy the confidence of the people, while we have sought prior approval of the Supreme Court through the law ministry. If the Supreme Court rejects our proposal, or replace the proposed judges with others, we have nothing to say.'

Meanwhile, the law ministry sources told The Daily Star that the SC had approved the EC plan, but assigned three other judges to do the job.

Action against 4 magistrates challenged

The Bangladesh Administrative Service Association has submitted a memorandum to the government protesting the suspension of four magistrates by the Election Commission for their alleged neglect of duty during the Tangail by-election, reports UNB.

The association leaders handed over the memorandum to the Cabinet and Establishment secretaries yesterday seeking government intervention.

Sources said some 500 administrative cadre officials along with the leaders of the association met the two secretaries and challenged the suspension of the four magistrates.

'Magistrates are posted to election centres to oversee law and order, not to look after the voting matters,' the association said.

The Election Commission had suspended four magistrates and four presiding officers following complaints about vote irregularities in four centres in Tangail-8 constituency.

Meanwhile, an administrative official, preferring not to be named, said the association leaders were preparing to go to court challenging the Election Commission's actions. They have already consulted a senior lawyer.

The members of the association are also putting pressure on their leaders to decide that the administrative officials will not perform their duties in December 8 by-elections in Rajshahi, Sirajganj and Kishoreganj.

Neighbour of Rubel cross-examined

By Court Correspondent

Five defence lawyers yesterday cross-examined a neighbour of Rubel in the Third Additional Metropolitan Sessions' Judge's Court yesterday.

Shamim Reza Rubel, 24, a BBA student at Independent University, was picked up by a team of Detective Branch of Police near his residence on July 23 last year and was subsequently tortured to death in the custody the same day, according to CID.

Ten of the 14 charge-sheeted accused, including AC Akram and Mukuli Begum, were produced before the court yesterday.

The rest — Si Nurul Alam and constables Mong She Oen, Abul Kalam Azad and Zakir Hossain — have been absconding since the killing.

Lawyers for five arrested accused — Mukuli Begum, Inspector Aminul Islam, ASI Karim and constables — Mir Faruk and Kamrul Hasan — yesterday cross-examined Abu Taher, the neighbour and also a tenant of Rubel's father, for about one and a half hours.

Lawyers for the rest six accused are likely to cross-examine Abu Taher today. Earlier on Sunday lawyers for three accused completed cross-examination of Abu Taher.

'Rash Mela' at Kuakata begins

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, Nov 22: The 3-day 'Rash Mela', a religious festival of the Hindu community, began here today.

The main attraction of the festival is the traditional gathering at Kuakata, a well-known sea resort in Patuakhali in the southern region of the country.

Meanwhile, thousands of people have already gathered at Kuakata or sailed for Dublar Char in the Bay near the Sundarbans.

The festival that takes place during the full moon is being observed at Kuakata and Dublar Char for the last 300 years.

Osmany Udyan

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time prevented journalists from using the link road from Abdul Ghani Road to the park. A policeman said he received orders yesterday from 'higher authorities' not to allow anyone use the road. Asked how people other than journalists are walking down the road, he asked newsmen to leave without further question or else face his wrath.

When journalists tried to take a picture of an office of the Ward number 56 Awami League near the main entrance of the park some, people rushed down the place and bluntly ordered them not to take pictures.

The new DCC possession starts from the AL office.

DCC has taken over parts of the shaded park with trees to construct a 'hawkers' market', after its effort last year was torpedoed by an order from the prime minister that said there should not be any markets or construction on open spaces in the city.

Jewel murder

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running to avoid harassment. Havildar Bashar and constable Ajmir chased Jewel, who fell into the sewer canal near an under construction box culvert at South Kamapur.

Jewel cried out for help, but the two policemen did not help him. They watched as he drowned.

The incident drew some local people, who urged the policemen to rescue Jewel. But instead, the two policemen threatened to arrest them. Nuruddin Sohel alleged in his petition.