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PM to take steps as per Constitution

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday questioned whether opposition leader Khaleda Zia at all believes in democracy, constitution and election process after her outright rejection of talks on the appointment of Chief Election Commissioner on consensus, reports UNB.

"In the wake of the present stance she (Khaleda) has taken, I put this question to the people to ascertain if she at all believes in democracy, constitution and election," Hasina said at a meeting with the leaders of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) at her Ganobhaban official residence.

The Prime Minister's remarks came following BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia's abrupt change in her position while addressing a public meeting at Bhurungamari (Kurigram) on Sunday rejecting a planned dialogue with Awami League on nominating a consensus CEC.

Referring to the relevant constitutional provision, she said the President appoints the CEC on the advice of the Prime Minister.

Explaining her own conviction on appointing a new CEC, Hasina said despite the constitutional prerogative, she invited the opposition leader to have a consensus on the matter in the interest of democracy and parliamentary practices.

About the government's follow-up action, she said CEC is a constitutional post, which should not be left vacant for long.

Fresh movement has begun, says Khaleda

ULIPUR, Kurigram, May 15: A day after dismissing the government's proposal for discussion on appointing a new CEC, Opposition Leader Khaleda Zia here today said a fresh movement has begun, reports UNB.

"A fresh movement began today. Ousting the Awami League government is the main objective of the movement," she said while addressing a public meeting on the local Shaheed Minar premises.

Khaleda blasted the government for "hatching conspiracies one after another and grabbing public money" and said they want to make Bangladesh a subservient state for remaining in power permanently.

The current movement is not only of four and seven-party, rather of the masses, she said. The former prime minister referred to a letter of Bangladesh Bank Governor that "all the banks will be bankrupt if the government continues the current trend of taking money from the banks."

Our new numbers

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May	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
16	5-15 am	6-34 pm

Prayer Timings

May 16		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-15	4-45
Zohr	1-00	1-30
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-35	6-38
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

Govt accuses Khaleda of scuttling talks

By Staff Correspondent

The move for a dialogue between the ruling party and the Opposition to nominate a new chief election commissioner took a U-turn yesterday as Finance Minister S A M S Kibria communicated to BNP negotiator Saifur Rahman that there was no longer any scope for such talks.

Kibria blamed Opposition leader Khaleda Zia for 'destroying' the environment for a dialogue by making a public statement that she wanted appointment of a new chief election commissioner after the government handed over power to a caretaker administration.

A few minutes after talking to Saifur, the Finance Minister held a press conference at his office at 3:15 pm to inform the nation about the developments.

Earlier in the morning, members of Sheikh Hasina's Cabinet reviewed the developments in the back-stage communications between Kibria and Saifur. After Kibria's briefing on the latest situation, the Prime Minister and her Cabinet colleagues found Khaleda Zia's public statement contradictory to the ruling party's spirit to resolve the issue through discussion, a minister told The Daily Star last night.

The PM then advised the Finance Minister that he should inform the people about it through the media.

Khaleda Zia reportedly said

at the public rally at Kurigram on Sunday that they would select a "good" chief election commissioner in consultation with all parties after the government of Sheikh Hasina handed over power to a caretaker administration.

"There is no longer any scope for dialogue with the opposition for nomination of a new CEC", Kibria said at the press conference.

He blamed Khaleda Zia for 'destroying' the atmosphere for the planned dialogue at the second layer of leaderships of the two sides and said, "the PM would now nominate a CEC as per constitutional provisions".

Talking to The Daily Star, Kibria said, "Begum Zia is solely responsible for the situation. Her statement has destroyed the environment for a dialogue. She did not keep any room for moving forward. It is clear that she does not want a chief election commissioner now. She wants it after hand over of power to a caretaker government. A constitutional post like chief election commissioner cannot remain vacant for long."

Asked when the PM is going to nominate a new CEC, Kibria said, "I do not know. Nor I would like to speculate on the issue."

Saifur refused to make any comment on the development.

When contacted over telephone at Moulabhibazar last

night, he said, "I cannot make any comment until I have a discussion with Begum Zia tomorrow (Tuesday). The only thing I can tell you now is that the Finance Minister communicated to me at around 3:00 pm that there was no longer any scope for a dialogue on the issue, especially after Begum Zia's public statement at Kurigram."

Replying to a query, Saifur said, "According to the latest understanding between the Finance Minister and myself, I was supposed to hand over to him a list of opposition negotiators after Begum Zia's return to Dhaka."

Saifur, who went to Sylhet yesterday afternoon, is scheduled to return to the capital today.

The crises regarding appointment of a new CEC arose following resignation of Mohammad Abu Hena on May 8.

After his resignation, the initiative for discussion on the appointment of a new CEC came from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. She invited the Leader of the Opposition in Jatiya Sangsad Khaleda Zia for talks with her on the issue at the Prime Minister's office.

Meantime, they have exchanged four letters, two each, without any positive result.

Alongside the official communication, Kibria and Saifur were trying for a consensus on the issue through talks at the second layer of leaderships.

Unusual incident at Supreme Court

By M Shamsur Rahman

The Supreme Court yesterday witnessed a stormy session, triggered by a senior lawyer who claimed that one of the judges passed a sarcastic remark about dispensing justice.

Barrister Rafique-ul-Huq, while arguing in one of the sensational 1996 share scam cases, at one stage burst into anger alleging that one of the judges, Justice Kazi Ebadul Huq, made a sarcastic remark that it is difficult to put rich people in the dock.

"What kind of comment is that," Huq said. "What will people think of the judiciary if a sitting judge of the Supreme Court makes such comments." Huq exclaimed before the Full Bench including Chief Justice Latifur Rahman.

Rafique-ul-Huq was repre-

sented by three companies against which the capital market regulators filed cases for manipulating the share market in 1996.

Huq's statement surprised the judges.

"What happened?" the Chief Justice asked.

Huq repeated the alleged remark by Justice Kazi Ebadul Huq, at the top of his voice.

But most of the judges were seen looking at each other trying to understand what went wrong.

Justice Ebadul Huq said that if Barrister Rafique-ul-Huq had any objection about him then he can state that and the judge concerned will not hear his case.

But Huq continued to speak

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Opposition's mass procession in city today

By Staff Correspondent

The BNP-led opposition alliance will bring out a mass procession in the city today demanding resignation of the government and trial of the ministers who threatened the judges.

As per the programme, leaders and activists of the BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote will assemble at Paltan Maidan at 4 pm and bring out the procession from there.

Secretaries general of the four parties will lead the procession which will parade different city streets.

Meanwhile, a meeting of the Dhaka city unit of Liaison Committee yesterday discussed the preparation of today's mass procession and took up a number of steps to make it a success.

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Bangabazar drama ends

By Staff Correspondent

Shops at Mahanagar Hawkers Market in the city were returned to the dispossessed owners yesterday noon, about 60 hours after occupation of those by armed goons.

The DC (South) of DMP handed over the shops to the association leaders in presence of the deputy chief revenue officer of the Dhaka City Corporation. Leaders of the market association showed the goons took away Tk 10 lakh from their office and some shops. Other damages and losses were still being calculated.

A gang of armed elements allegedly backed by some ruling party MPs took over the market at about 10:30 pm on Friday.

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NCBs plan rate cut

By Inam Ahmed

The Nationalised Commercial Banks (NCBs) are mulling over reduction of interest rates on term lending for some specific sectors, according to sources.

Managing directors of the four NCBs yesterday met Finance Secretary Dr Akhbar Ali Khan and told him that they might reduce interest rates for some specific sectors like information technology (IT), fully export-oriented industries, agro-based industries and industries which use fully local raw materials.

According to sources, the four banks will prepare a report on how many percentage points they can slash from the existing rates for submission to the ministry shortly.

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City dwellers suffer in heat, power failures

By Staff Correspondent

Intolerable heat coupled with frequent power disruptions increased people's misery in the city yesterday.

The DESA control room said last night that there was only 70 MW load shedding in the city capital and adjacent areas yesterday. Besides, there was additional load shedding in some parts of the city due to overload on different lines.

But people from different parts of the city alleged that the power situation in the capital yesterday was the worst in the last couple of days.

A resident of city's Kalyanpur area alleged that starting from early morning the area had experienced frequent power disruptions throughout the day.

The highest temperature in Dhaka yesterday was 35.8 degree Celsius more than a degree higher than that of the day before, sources at the met office said.

The temperature in the capi-

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Asma with her mother only a few days prior to her death. — Star file photo



Indian soldiers look at the debris of a vehicle damaged in a land mine explosion at Chabran in Kashmir yesterday that killed five people including Power Minister Ghulam Hasan Bhatt. — AFP photo

Minister killed in Kashmir

Farooq Abdullah on the hit-list of militants

JAMMU, India, May 15: A minister in the insurgency-torn Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir was killed in south Kashmir when an explosive planted by suspected guerrillas blew up his car today, police said, report agencies.

A senior police official told Reuters that junior power minister Ghulam Hassan Bhatt and four others were killed when their car went over an improvised explosive device at 9:15 am in Anantnag district's Dooru village, 70 km south of Srinagar.

"The minister's bullet-proof car and the security escort vehicle were blown by the impact of the blast," he said.

Local police and government officials from nearby Anantnag district have rushed to the area.

Nearly a dozen militant groups are fighting New Delhi's

rule in Jammu and Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, where police and hospitals say more than 30,000 people have been killed in a decade of separatist rebellion.

Meanwhile, Kashmir's largest Muslim guerrilla group today claimed responsibility for the assassination of Bhatt, and warned that it would target other officials here.

A spokesman of the Hizbul Mujahideen guerrilla force told AFP on telephone that it staged the landmine ambush for Bhatt while the minister was coming to Srinagar from his constituency in southern Kokarnag district.

Bhatt along with his two guards, driver and radioman died instantly when a landmine blew up his bulletproof car in Chabran.

"We owe the responsibility for the blast," Hizbul spokesman

Kaleem Sadiqi told AFP by telephone.

"Bhatt was on our hit-list because he used to give directions to Indian security forces for quashing militancy in Kashmir," Sadiqi said.

He warned that Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah and some more members from his 24-member ministerial council would be targeted by the pro-Pakistani organisation, the largest and the best armed guerrilla group in Kashmir.

"Several other (Kashmir) ministers including Abdullah are on our hit-lists," Sadiqi warned.

Bhatt is the first provincial minister to be assassinated here since the launch of the Muslim separatist drive here in 1989. More than 25,000 others have died in separatist violence since then in Kashmir.

Another report adds, Seven

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Biosafety act in the offing

By Reaz Ahmad

A biosafety act is being drafted to remove the last obstacle to genetic research in the country.

The draft act will be ready by next month and then placed in the Jatiya Sangsad, according to sources in the task force formed to prepare it.

Once passed by parliament, the act will give legal cover to the already prepared biosafety guidelines for safe genetic research and engineering and scope for legal protection against their probable fallout on environment and ecology.

The government move came at a time when collaborative projects with international research institutes are pending due to lack of a biosafety act.

the sources said. Some genetically modified (GM) seeds have already been brought in the country but research on those is withheld in the absence of legal protection, the sources said.

Funds have already been allocated for setting up of a National Institute of Biotechnology (NIB) at Savar. The Prime Minister laid its foundation on Sunday.

The task force headed by the secretary, ministry of science and technology, was formed last month. It comprises representatives from ministries of law, commerce, environment, academics from Dhaka University and experts who prepared the biosafety guidelines.

Experts say, although

Bangladesh is now capable of entering into genetic research, it cannot be done in the absence of enough safety laws, and donor agencies are also not coming forth with assistance.

Appropriate biosafety measures has become a priority for many governments since the 'Rio Earth Summit' in 1993.

According to experts, genetically modified organisms (GMOs) that are considered harmless in one region might be potentially harmful in another region in different environmental conditions.

Special care is required so that introduction of GMOs does not interfere in protection of genetic resources and biodiversity.

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Nat'l budget on June 8

Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria yesterday said the upcoming national budget would be a pro-people one, reports UNB.

He told a press briefing at his office that the budget for 2000-2001 will be placed in Parliament on June 8.

Kibria parried questions on his budget projection and probable fiscal measures.

Responding to question whether the Prime Minister has ordered punishment to the tax officials responsible for short-fall of revenue collection, the Finance Minister said, "I did not receive any such order. But the Prime Minister herself can issue such order — may be she did."

Cabinet okays amendment to Public Demands Recovery Act

The Council of Ministers at its regular meeting yesterday approved the amendment to the Public Demands Recovery Act, 1913, reports UNB.

The Cabinet also approved the draft for amendment to the Members of the Bangladesh Public Service Commission (Terms and conditions of service) Act, 1974.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina chaired the meeting at the conference room in her office.

Cabinet members, states ministers in charge of different ministries, PM's principal secretary and secretaries of various ministries attended the meeting, said an official release.

DAB clarification

The Diabetic Association of Bangladesh (DAB) has issued a clarification on a news item headlined — BIRDEM cardiac centre: Tender irregularities detected — published in The Daily Star on April 26.

The clarification said: The project Advisory Committee while studying the recommendations of the Technical Evaluation Committee found the following flaws in tender procedures.

(a) Due to lack of detail specifications proper comparison and evaluation could not be made as stated by the Chairman of the Technical Evaluation Committee.

(b) Other bidders did not get even second opportunity to negotiate their prices, whereas negotiations were made 4 (four) times with M/s Siemens (Bangladesh) Ltd. spanning a period of 5 months.

(c) Even after negotiations, the price of equipment quoted by M/s Siemens (Bangladesh)

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Shahjalal University reopens today

From Staff Correspondent SYLHET, May 15: Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST) will reopen tomorrow after 145 days of closure.

The decision was taken after fruitful talks between the university authorities and leaders of All-Party Action Committee.

Most of the students have already reached the campus while the rest are expected to reach within two or three days.

The deadlock was created following decision of the Syndicate at its 87th meeting held in August last year.

The Syndicate decided to name different buildings and halls of the university after

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Work on fresh electoral roll begins

The Election Commission launched its programme to prepare fresh voters' list across the country yesterday, reports UNB.

Normally such occasion is begun with registering President, Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, Chief Justice and Chief Election Commissioner as voter. But this time it began with issuance of instruction to the field level workers to prepare the fresh electoral roll.

Some three lakh enumerators, 73,000 supervisors and more than 6,000 assistant registration officers started working all over the country to enroll about six crore voters for the next general election due next year.

Assistant registration officers were appointed from among those level government officers. Most of the supervisors and enumerators are teachers of the government or government approved schools.

Officials hoped that enrolment of voters would be completed in next two months.

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Sacrificed at altar of negligence

By Naimul Haq

Doctors' blunder has eventually cost her life.

After struggling for life for almost two years, the nineteen-year-old girl who was surviving on a transplanted kidney, died at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital (BSMMUH) on Sunday night.

Her 'only functioning kidney' was removed by doctors at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) during an operation for removal of ovarian tumour. Then she had a transplanted kidney, donated by her mother Zahura Begum.

DMCH doctors said they had removed Asma's kidney by 'mistake'.

Prof Mahmuda Khatun, a gynaecologist at DMCH, aided by her colleagues, had operated on Asma for removing a tumour on her ovary. Asma's five-month pregnancy was also terminated during the operation performed on August 11, 1998.

But the doctors later said they had 'accidentally' removed her kidney.

Dr Nazma Nasrin, who first

cut open Asma's abdomen for the surgery, said she had seen a 'huge tumour twisted in her intestine — a complicated case'. Prior to the operation, ultrasonography had confirmed that Asma had a 'pelvic mass'.

Despite such confirmation, it is not yet clear why Prof Mahmuda Khatun and her team removed Asma's kidney considering it 'diseased', without even consulting kidney specialists (urologists). The operation was fixed previously as per routine schedule and it was not conducted as an emergency case.

A kidney specialist, when contacted at that time, had told this correspondent, "A patient with an 80 per cent damaged kidney can lead a normal life, but it was not determined if Asma's kidney had any damage at all."

When all these came to light, DMCH doctors tried a cover up. But a media focus on the issue led to an official enquiry and her quick transfer to BSMMUH on September 7, 1998. She had a kidney transplant there on

February 2, 1999.

Following the surgery the government had formed a probe body to investigate into the matter. The DMCH authority almost at the same time had also formed a committee to investigate into the matter but neither of the reports has so far been made public for mysterious reasons.

Two probe bodies were formed in this connection — one by the health ministry and the other by the DMCH authorities. But findings of the probe bodies were yet to be made public.

A human rights organisation — Adhikar — had filed a writ at that time, accusing the health secretary, principal of DMCH, director of DMCH, Prof Mahmuda Khatun, Dr Golam Mostafa and Dr Fatema.

Bangladesh Society for Enforcement of Human Rights had also filed a case with the CMM's Court, but after investigation by Ramna police, it was dismissed. The society then went to the district court and the case is now pending with it.