

Dialogue with CEC BNP stresses immediate electoral reforms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP has emphasised immediate reform of electoral laws and urged the Election Commission (EC) to take all steps to ensure that the coming parliamentary election is free and fair.

The EC must also ensure neutrality of government officials during the elections, the party stressed.

A seven-member delegation of the major opposition party was having a three-hour meeting with Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) M A Syed at his office yesterday.

"We have discussed the issues which matter in election and suggested the Commission to take strong measures for holding a free and fair election," leader of the delegation M K Anwar MP later told a group of journalists.

BNP sat for such a meeting for the first time since

Awami League came to power in 1996. It had opposed appointment of Syed as CEC in May last year.

The Election Commission initiated the process of talks with political parties. Terming yesterday's meeting 'positive', the CEC said, "We will ensure fairness at any cost in the coming election. No negligence of duties during election by the authorities concerned will be tolerated."

In reply to question, he said, "None has raised question about my neutrality. I have proved my impartiality and trustworthiness."

None of the three Election Commissioners however were present at yesterday's meeting.

BNP earlier gave a condition that it would not attend a meeting with the EC if Election Commissioner Safiur Rahman remained present, alleging that he was loyal to the ruling Awami League. Rahman was at his office

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Chief Election Commissioner MA Syed makes a point during a meeting with the leaders of the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) at his office in the city yesterday.

Attack on Khaleda's motorcade 7 BNP men jailed in Cox's Bazar

UNB, Cox's Bazar

Seven BNP activist, six of them are brothers, were yesterday convicted and sentenced to seven years' rigorous imprisonment each for launching attack on the motorcade of opposition leader Khaleda Zia at Ramu on April 9 last year.

Judge of the special court dealing with cases under the Public Safety Act, Bhabani Prasad Sinha, also fined them Tk 2000 each, in default to suffer another four months of RI.

The convicts are Moslehuddin, Liaqat Noor, Ashrafuddin, Giasuddin, Salahuddin and Mohiuddin, sons of Montaj Mia, and Shamim Ullah, son of Haji Nurul

Huda of village Masuakhali Shikderpara in Ramu upazila.

The motorcade of BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia came under attack on its way to Chakoria for a party meeting. The incident took place at Natunbazar on Chittagong-Cox's Bazar highway on April 9 last year in which some 8 cars were damaged.

The incident occurred following internal conflict involving two BNP leaders of the area.

A case was filed under PSA with Ramu thana in this connection on April 10 and police on June 7 submitted chargesheet against 10 people.

The court acquitted three of those accused in the case.

All issues should be settled before transfer of power: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday reaffirmed her intention to hold general elections before the end of dry season, but said everything should be settled before handing over power to a caretaker government.

"We are thinking about early election for the convenience of the people, for massive participation of voters, which is possible only through holding the election before the end of dry season," she said.

Addressing the leaders and workers of Sherpur District Awami League and its front organisations at Ganobhaban, the Prime Minister said the question of resignation is being raised and "we are thinking about early election to show respect to people's voting right".

But before the handover of

power to a neutral caretaker government, all issues including the formation of caretaker government should be settled.

Instead of raising those issues, she observed, the opposition is only demanding resignation of the government, which has created doubt in public mind as to whether the opposition really wants election or not.

The Prime Minister said the government had already voluntarily decided to transfer power to facilitate the holding of election by next June. So, the question of resignation does not arise, she said, requesting the opposition to settle the issue of process of the polls.

Questioning the sincerity of the opposition about the next elections, Sheikh Hasina said the opposition parties are accustomed to capturing power through conspiracy.

She urged the people to remain alert against any conspiracy of capturing power by unconstitutional means. "You will have to remain alert so none can snatch your voting right again."

Hasina said BNP leader Khaleda Zia is conspiring to save the killers of Bangabandhu.

She said her party launched a long struggle for establishing democratic rights of the people and would continue its effort to protect those rights.

She said the opposition has suffered defeat in the movement and will again get a good drubbing in the election. "We have faith and confidence in the people and we are working for them."

The Prime Minister said the parties that were in power during post-75 period only amassed wealth

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Nari Samaj renews call for direct election to reserved seats

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sammilata Nari Samaj (SNS) has reiterated its demand for direct election to reserved seats for women in the Jatiya Sangsad.

Addressing a rally at Shahbagh crossing in the city yesterday, SNS leaders urged the women not to cast vote in the coming parliamentary elections if the demand is not met before the polls.

"We are demanding direct election to reserved seats for women for the last few years but neither the ruling party nor the Opposition paid any heed to it," said Farida Akhter.

Both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition are keeping mum on the issue, she added.

Elina Khan called upon the women not to cast vote in the forth

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Bangabandhu Murder Case Acquittal of a convict misled people, argues prosecution

UNB, Dhaka

Prosecution yesterday submitted before the High Court that by acquitting a condemned convict in the Bangabandhu Murder Case on the ground of prolonged remand, the judge "misdirected the people and himself."

Chief Prosecutor Serajul Huq made the observation with regard to the acquittal of Col Mohiuddin Ahmed (Artillery) by the appeal court.

He made this sharp remark as he began argument on the death references in the Bangabandhu Murder Case in the third-judge bench of Justice Mohammad Fazlul Karim after the vacation.

"If there was a jury, then it would have been considered misdirection

to the jury, but here the people are the jury. So the judge has misdirected the people and himself," said Huq refuting Justice Ruhul Amin's ground for acquitting Mohiuddin, along with four other army officers, of the charges against him in the Bangabandhu Murder Case.

The two-judge bench gave a split verdict on the death reference on December 14 last year, where senior judge Ruhul Amin acquitted five of the convicts, while Justice Khairul Huq upheld the conviction against all the 15 army men sentenced to death by the trial court.

Acquitting Col Mohiuddin, Justice Ruhul Amin in his judgement remarked that the accused had been held in police custody for nine days although the magistrate granted remand for seven days.

Pointing at prolonged custody, Justice Amin in his judgement came to the conclusion that the confessional statement of the accused was neither true nor voluntary.

Refuting, Adv Serajul Huq told the court that Mohiuddin had not been in police custody for nine days.

Mohiuddin was arrested on Nov 18, 1996 and as per law he was produced before court the following day, Huq submitted before the single-judge HC bench, saying that he was reproduced before the court on November 27.

"On no count was he kept in police custody for nine days," as said by senior judge in his judgement, Huq argued and said even if the accused had been with police for eight days, it was an irregularity, but

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PM apprised of financial, audit reports

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said that her government has been able to ensure financial accountability at all levels with the adoption of some measures.

She made this remark while she was apprised of various financial and audit reports by the Chief Comptroller and Auditor General Syed Yusuf Hossain at her Ganobhaban office in the city yesterday morning.

The reports included four special audit reports, 24 annual reports, eight appropriation reports and two finance accounts reports.

The Prime Minister suggested there should also be a system for inter-ministerial audit for transparency and accountability.

The Auditor General said that financial management and audit

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Goalmouth melee during yesterday's semifinal clashes between India and Egypt (left), and Pakistan and Japan at the Maulana Bhasani National Stadium. Arch-rivals India and Pakistan are in for a mouth-watering final date for the Prime Minister Gold Cup trophy on Tuesday.

Canadian HC voices concern over use of small arms, terrorism

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Canadian High Commissioner in Bangladesh David Preston has expressed grave concern over use of small arms and terrorism in Bangladesh and stressed the need for addressing the issue urgently. "It astounds me to see people carrying weapons in presence of police during political processions. Arms pose a serious threat to holding of free and fair election and democratic practice," he said.

The High Commissioner was addressing a 'Meet the Reporters' programme organised by the Dhaka Reporters' Unity (DRU) at its auditorium yesterday. DRU President M Anwarul Haq and General Secretary Motaher

Hossain Masum also spoke on the occasion.

Referring to his recent visit to Khulna, Preston said he saw many people at a local hotel carrying arms in their pockets. Quoting newspaper reports, he also cited the February 13 incident at Malibagh in the city in which four persons were killed in shots fired on an Opposition procession.

In this context he said Canada would be supporting a regional conference on "Small Arms in Bangladesh" in April. "We both (Canada and Bangladesh) share a desire to come to an international agreement to control smuggling and use of illegal weapons," he added.

Referring to frequent hartals, he

said, democracy can be institutionalised only through election and parliament and all concerned should abide by the rules of democracy avoiding violence.

Preston said the people of Bangladesh will soon face the most important event in democratic practice -- general election. A free and fair election has to be ensured and the loser must accept the result.

"This is sometimes not easy. But Bangladesh is competent enough to hold free and fair polls. "Will it not be wonderful if the election takes place without any incident, is declared free and fair, is accepted by all and Bangladesh enjoys the benefits of a well-

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Corruption cases Hearing on Ershad's bail petitions April 8

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka yesterday fixed April 8 for hearing on the bail petitions of former President HM Ershad, in two corruption cases.

The Judge, Ahmed Jamil Mostafa passed the order after hearing on the issue, submitted against the rejection order of the CMM's Court, Dhaka on March 13.

Advocate Sheikh Sirajul Islam, lawyer for Ershad, filed two separate criminal revisions with the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, for bail stating that he (Ershad) was implicated in the cases as part of conspiracy to harass him politically.

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Mystery shrouds arrest at ZIA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The arrest of the Bangladesh national settled in the US from the Zia International Airport is shrouded in mystery.

Authorities of Civil Aviation held Syed Mamun-or-Rashid at the departure lounge of ZIA Saturday morning and handed him over to the cantonment police, claiming that the man forcibly entered the security cordon.

Police said they had arrested Mamun under 54 of the Criminal Prosecution Code (CrPC). Although no specific case was brought against him, police on Saturday claimed that the man was arrested on charge of plotting a plane hijack.

Sources close to the investigation said arrogant misbehaviour with the

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MA Hannan Int'l Airport opens on March 24

BSS, Ctg

Chittagong Airport, renamed M A Hannan International Airport, is scheduled to open for international air traffic on March 24 after undergoing a thorough modernisation and expansion programme.

The present government after coming to power renamed the old airport after Hannan, the man who, at the directive of Bangabandhu, read out the proclamation of Independence of Bangladesh.

Hannan, a veteran Awami League leader read out the proclamation of Independence of Bangladesh at 2.15 am on March 26, 1971 from Kalurghat Transmission Centre. The airport was renamed in recog-

nition to his contribution.

Plans were taken by the government to develop the domestic airport into an international one to meet the long demand of the people of this port city.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate the newly constructed Taka 541 crore Airport on Saturday in the presence of nearly 3000 guests. Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Housing and Public Works Engineer Mosharraf Hossain said.

Engineer Mosharraf said the half-century old airport was developed into a modern airport with a view to improving air safety, establishment of alternate airport to Zia

International Airport, creation of employment opportunity, attraction of overseas investment, tourism and above all promotion of economic and commercial facilities in Chittagong region.

The minister informed that Civil Aviation authority will not control the Chittagong airport like Dhaka Airport. He said soon after its inauguration, international tender will be invited to run the airport by private entrepreneurs to make the operational activities more effective and transparent. A project concept paper in this context has been prepared and approved by the cabinet to implement the same likely from next July, he said.

Babul Murder Case Reinvestigation ordered

BSS, Dhaka

Home Minister Mohammad Nasim yesterday ordered the Inspector General of Police (IGP) to reinvestigate Obaidul Haq Babul murder case.

Instruction has also been given to take on remand the arrested persons allegedly involved in the killing, he said.

Babul was gunned down in front of Anannya Apparels at Pallabi in the city in October, 1996.

Hearing on Adel's bail petition on April 8

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka yesterday fixed April 8 for hearing on the bail petition of Jahangir Mohammad Adel accused in Kamal Hossain Murder Case.

The Judge Ahmad Jamil Mostafa passed the order after hearing on the issue, submitted against the rejection order of the CMM's Court, Dhaka on March 14.

Advocate TM Akbar, lawyer for the accused, submitted a bail petition stating that Adel's name was not in the FIR.