

Asia Foundation

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single meeting till yesterday while law and order deteriorated in the last couple of days.

Asked why the EC could meet on three consecutive days since the decision was taken, EC spokesman Khairuzzaman Chowdhury refused to say anything.

"I will not take any question from newsmen," said Chowdhury who is Additional Secretary of the EC Secretariat. Briefing newsmen he said, "I was authorised to speak only what I have said."

The Asia Foundation will distribute the accreditation cards as it decides, some EC official noted. In such a situation, they feared, those might not be distributed among the right people. According to the EC guidelines, Returning Officers (ROs) are to distribute the cards among eligible observers who are not politically biased.

The Asia Foundation has formed an election monitoring observers' group comprising 29 NGOs, to whom it channelled over Tk 50 crore to observe the election. These NGOs are Association for Community Development (Rajshahi), Alo (Kustia), Association for Social Welfare Media and Activities (Dhaka), Action on Disability and Development (Dhaka), Baste Shekah (Jessore), Bangladesh Human Right's Commission (Dhaka), Bangladesh Labour Research Foundation (Dhaka), Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights (Dhaka), Bangladesh Nari Progati Shanga, Brotee, Bangladesh Manabadhikar Samannya Parishad, Coast Trust, Democracy Watch, Khan Foundation, Liberty Movement, Mass Line Media Centre, National Election Observation Council, Naripakkha, Odhiker, Rangpur-Dinajpur Rural Service, RUDISOF, Rupantar

(Khulna), Service Civil International Bangladesh, Shariatpur Development Society, Social Network, Society for Asian Democracy, Society for Environment and Human Development, Society for Health and Care and the Wave.

Despite allegations of political affiliation of some observer groups, the EC permitted 15 NGOs on request from Canadian High Commissioner in Dhaka David Preston. Of the 15 NGOs, 10 are going for polls monitoring for the first time this time.

In a letter, Preston requested Chief Election Commissioner M A Syed to allow the observer groups. EC's newly appointed Public Relations Officer Mahbubul Alam, in reply to the letter, confirmed that his (Preston's) request was accepted

"It has been decided to allow all the organisations mentioned in the attachment of your letter to observe the coming parliamentary election. Of the 15 organisations in your list, eleven do not seem to have contacted us before. Names of the rest five FEMA, Democracy Watch, Khan Foundation, Mass Line Media Center and the Odhiker-- are already included in the list of organisations who observed '91 and '96 elections. DCs/ROs have already been advised to give priority to them. Now the names of the newcomers have also been forwarded to the DCs/ROs for issuance of accreditation cards to the prospective observers," the reply reads.

Besides, some election observer groups have collected accreditation cards from the EC Secretariat, instead of taking those from the ROs concerned. FEMA has collected some 12,000 cards, some EC sources said.

US embassy torched

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Mohammad Khan told a news conference.

He said also that Pakistan was not prepared to join military action against Afghanistan itself.

AFP adds: The bank accounts of Al Rashid Trust, a Pakistan-based organisation linked to terrorism by the United States, have been frozen. "The bank informed us today that all our accounts have been frozen until further notice on orders from above," spokesman Mohammad Abdullah said yesterday. The Trust was included on a list of 27 individuals or groups identified as being linked to terrorism by US President George W Bush on Monday. AP from Tehran says, Iran's supreme leader condemned the United States yesterday as being not "competent" and "disgusting," and vowed that his country would not cooperate with any US-led attack on Afghanistan.

In a state-run television address to the nation, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said the US administration was "over expectant" in wanting the whole world to help it following the September 11 terrorist attacks. "Iran will not participate in any move under US leadership. Iran will not extend any assistance to the US and its allies in attacking the already suffering Muslim neighbouring Afghanistan," Khamenei said in an address to families of soldiers killed in the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war.

America's behaviour, by expecting help but not earning the respect of other nations, was "disgusting," Khamenei said, adding that Iran did not consider the United States "competent and sincere (enough) to lead any global campaign against terrorism." He did not elaborate.

Khamenei also rejected America's declaration to the world that nations had to choose between being "with us or terrorism."

"We are not with you," he said in a comment directed toward the United States. "At the same time, we are not with terrorists. America is not sincere in fighting terrorism. It has other objectives. America's hands are stained with all the crimes committed by the Zionist regime," he said.

Money can't buy us

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number of people in favour of 'boat', AL's polls symbol, local people said.

They said a large number of people are moving door to door from afternoon to till late night, seeking vote for Salman. Some BNP workers however alleged that Salman engaged the people on regular payments.

They claimed that the eight UP chairmen in the constituency, who were supporters of Huda earlier, have now extended their support to Salman because he managed them by spending handsome amounts.

Salman denied the allegation. He said that out of the eight UP chairmen, five were AL workers since long. One UP chairman joined AL recently and the rest two supported him willingly, he claimed.

"So managing them with money is absolutely a false allegation," he said.

Salman also denied the allegation of spending "additional amount of money" for election purposes and bringing workers from across the river.

Awami League workers who are moving door to door seeking vote in favour of Salman also denied the

allegation of getting "extra money". "I get only Tk 125 per day from the candidate. I spend the amount for tea and entertaining workers," said Sirajul Islam, President of Moksudpur union Russell Smrity Sangsad.

"I do not get a single penny more," Siraj said. The Sangsad has a workforce of 45 youths who move in the area by rotation, he said.

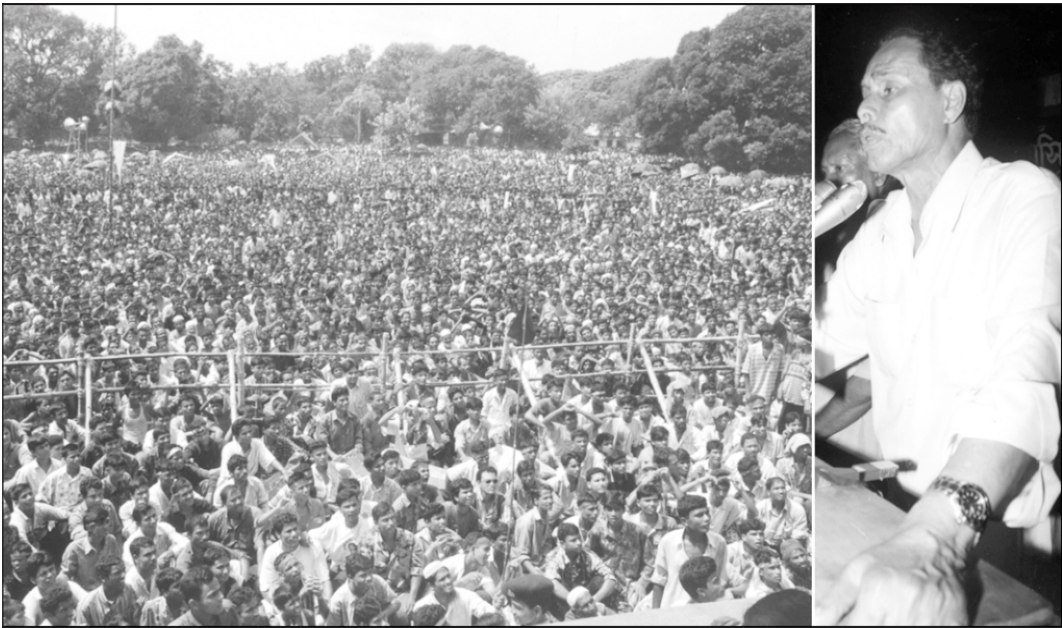
The main demand of the people of the area is direct road communication with the capital.

The direct road communication between Dhaka and Dohar was snapped two months back when about one kilometer road was washed away by the Padma at Moksudpur union.

Local people said they need restoration of the road communication immediately as they face tremendous difficulties to reach the capital.

Hundreds of passengers have to walk several kilometers and change buses at several points on their way to Dhaka.

Although the area is very close to the capital, people have to detour about 60 kilometres through Srinagar in Munshiganj, which takes more than two hours.



Jatiya Party chairman HM Ershad addressing an election rally in Kishoreganj yesterday.

Khaleda: 'Ballot bombs'

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years due to the AL's terrorism, corruption, killing, hijacking, extortion, grabbing of public and private property and other sorts of crimes. Referring to her month-long electioneering across the country, she said massive tide has been created in favour of the sheaf of paddy and the alliance, and a landslide victory is certain.

Turning to Bhola, Khaleda said the AL government did not initiate any development activities in the greater Barisal, particularly in Bhola, in last five years although an influential minister hailed from the district.

She said the minister, who himself is a terrorist, had instructed party terrorists to make bomb to subvert this election meeting. But the explosives went off while they were being manufactured in a house. She asked the police to arrest all the persons of the house.

Khaleda Zia said the 'terrorist' minister, who was in charge of the industries ministry, did not set up any industry in the country. Instead, he developed bomb-making factory in the country and nurtured terrorists.

She said the AL sensing a debacle in the forthcoming election is now out to subvert it and resorting to violence to upset the polls atmosphere. But, election will be held on schedule and no-one can disrupt it, she added. She called upon the administration to immediately arrest the AL terrorists and recover illegal arms to create a congenial atmosphere for free and fair polls.

She told the people of Bhola that

her BNP government had implemented massive development programmes and started extraction of gas. But the AL miserably failed to supply the gas to the common people. She assured that if voted to power, her party along with the allies would ensure supply of gas to Bhola and other parts of the country, reach electricity to more rural areas and implement all other demands put forward by the local candidates.

The alliance chief also promised expansion of food for education programme all over the country, free education of girls up to the 12th class, soft loans to the women's IT institute in each district, setting up of small, medium and heavy industries for creation of employment opportunities.

Earlier, the former prime minister addressed two riverside election meetings at Baushia Launch Ghat under Hizla thana, organised in support of alliance candidate Mosharraf Hossain Mongu for the Barisal-3 seat, and Mahandiganj Steamship Ghat to garner support for Shah Abul Hossain for the Barisal-4 seat.

She also addressed election meetings at Doulatkhan and Borhanuddin in support of Hafiz Ibrahim and at Lalmoheon in support of Major (ret'd.) Hafizuddin Ahmed, Bir Bikram. After the day-long campaign in Bhola, Khaleda moved towards Dhulia under Patuakhali and Bakerganj. She was due to address election meetings at Patuakhali at midnight last night before returning to the capital this

morning. The BNP chairperson, who left for Bhola from Sadarghat terminal at 2am yesterday on board a launch, started holding riverside meetings from 9am. Khaleda and members of her entourage on board three big launches travelled the greater Barisal.

Thousands of people, mostly women, were gathered at the meetings. Hundreds of others waved to her standing on riverbanks. Khaleda Zia waved back to the cheering people and said a few words through the loudspeakers.

US plane

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obtained permission from the government in advance informing about its cargo manifest to the foreign ministry as per rules.

The official said the aircraft carried diplomatic pouches, food and beverages for diplomatic personnel of the local US embassy.

Senior airforce officials, when contacted, said they were not aware of any foreign aircraft making any 'unauthorised landing'.

A source close to the US embassy said late last night that it was a "a routine, pre-scheduled flight" to support embassy operations and said these flights were commonly done for US embassies around the world.

The source also brushed aside reports in a section of the press that the US was sending advance military teams. "There is nothing in those (reports)," the source close to the US embassy said.

Hasina ends cross-country tour

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assuring the people of a place in the heaven in return for votes cast in his favour.

Describing her government's steps for the promotion of Islam, Hasina asked how a leader like Amini, accused of killing police constable Badsha Mia inside a mosque in the capital, could be a Muslim. "Islam preaches peace and tolerance and there is no place of killing and confrontation in Islam."

In a scathing attack on her opponents, who had so long propagated that the AL would damage Islam, Hasina said people had seen in the past five years of her party's rule how much it served Islam.

She cited her government's development projects for mosques, madrasahs and other religious institutions for Muslims in her 40-minute speech at Sylhet.

In a bid to win the hearts of voters in Brahmanbaria, supposedly a strong base for fundamentalist Muslims, Hasina related how she strictly followed the edicts of Islam. "I've performed the Hajj and offer namaz (prayers) five times a day. I don't lie and don't believe in the policy of abusing religion for political gains."

She said her party's policies aimed at serving people and all its activities were devoted to the wellbeing of people, especially the downtrodden.

Hasina termed boat saviour of people and reminded her audience that Prophet Nuh (A) saved his people from the deluge with a boat. The boat earned the people of Bangladesh independence and food autarky, she said and promised for their economic emancipation if boat was elected in the coming polls.

The Sorail rally over, Hasina travelled to Sylhet touching Chunarughat, Bahubal, Madhavppur, Telipara and Shahbazpur in Habiganj, Srimongol and Kushumbagh in Moulvibazar and Bishwanath, Companyganj and Court point in Sylhet.

People in their thousands gathered at the election meetings in all those areas. They chanted slogans, and brandished replicas of boat, banners and festoons, and danced with beat of drums.

Frequent slogans for boat filled the air and a cheerful Hasina joined the slogan chanting masses. The Bahubal rally was smaller compared to the others she addressed yesterday.

The AL chief quoted a local leader of her party who said that she might belate for the meetings. "People thought that I would be

late as the BNP chief was. She joined a rally at the same spot 12 hours later than scheduled the other day. This is the difference between the Awami League and the BNP. We mean what we say. Besides we do our best not to cause sufferings to the people while the BNP does not keep its words."

Speaking at those rallies, Hasina reiterated her allegation that the BNP was conspiring to rig the October 1 polls through terrorism and media coup. She also repeated her call to the authorities for effective measures to ensure a free and fair election. "The Awami League will not accept any attempt to influence the election."

In her campaign at the tea garden areas in the greater Sylhet, the AL leader promised permanent residence for the workers who, she recalled, got Bangladesh's citizenship during the Bangabandhu regime. She also talked to a group of tea workers.

Hasina once again alerted the voters who were trying to buy their votes. "The migratory birds will approach you with bundles of money but they will forget you soon after the election. You have to decide who you will vote the one-day guests or the Awami League men who are always with you."

Garments sector feels chill

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that recovery of the US economy will be delayed by a few months; but there are gloomier predictions of an economic recession that may ultimately be transmitted globally."

Amidst such speculations, there may be some immediate cancellations of orders by the US buyers of our garments. Beyond such panic reaction, any forecast at this stage will be speculative, says Dr Mahmud with a cautious note.

"But judging from the trends already set in motion before the US attacks, we shall very likely have to contend with a much slower growth in export earnings than we have experienced in recent times. Even the possibility of an absolute fall in export earnings cannot be ruled out," he maintained. "We need to devise a strategy to cope with the global economic developments as they unfold."

But what are the policy options left to Bangladesh?

"On an immediate basis, the government should go for an exercise to do away with the infrastructure bottlenecks in ports and the administration to reduce cost of business for exporters," says Dr

Mustafizur Rahman, Research Director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD). "At the same time, special strategy has to be devised about the stocklot that will be created because of export dislocation. The government must sit with the banks to resolve this issue."

On a medium-term strategy, Bangladesh should now hammer for zero-tariff access of its exports to the US, he added.

Dr Mahmud says the economy will have to be adjusted to a lower growth in import demand without unduly jeopardising economic growth prospects.

"Aggressive policy measures will be needed to make our exports more competitive and diversified," he said. "We need to look for export markets outside the industrialised West as well. In particular, we need to find ways of improving our trade balance with India by negotiating better access of our exports to the Indian market."

A further risk to the country's external balance may arise from any increase in international oil prices due to the US war efforts. Again, it is difficult to make predictions regarding this. While fuel prices may rise

due to a 'war premium', a slowdown or recession in the US economy will tend to dampen both demand and prices.

"The long-term recession is becoming very much a reality and the import substitute industries will also suffer if our exports are hurt," said Latifur Rahman, President of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI). "The next elected government must sit immediately after taking oath and devise a strategy in line with what our competing countries are doing," he observed.

"Garments sector was going through a bad time because of diversion of orders to Caribbean countries after the USTDA," said Kutubuddin, President of BGMEA. "The election further dented orders during August-November period as buyers apprehended that political volatility would dislocate work. And now the attacks have come as an added shock. We must find ways to keep our garments profitable against a 50 per cent cutting and making charge drop."

40 candidates

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(Jamaipur-4), Mahbubul Alam Hanif (Kushlia-2), M Hanif Ali (Natore-2), Shamsul Haq (Mymensingh-2), Noor Ali (Dhaka-2), Kalparanjan Chakma (Khagrachhari), Dipankar Talukdar (Rangamati), Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury (Faridpur-2), Shamsul Haq (Nawabganj-3), Azizur Rahman (Moulvibazar-3), Kazi Sirajul Haq (Faridpur-1) and Matia Chowdhury (Sherpur-2).

JP (Ershad) and Islami Front: Majibar Rahman Sentu (Natore-2), Rawshan Ershad (Gaibandha-5), Mymensingh-4) and Abul Kalam Azad (Joypurhat-1).

Independent: AKM Bahauddin Bahar (Comilla-8), Alhaj Majibar Rahman (Moulvibazar-4) and Kazi Shahed Ahmed (Jessore-3).

Women voters

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vote. We believe that if a congenial atmosphere is created and the barriers are broken, a lot of women who have not cast vote in the past will come out of their houses and cast vote this time."

The special programme involves local elite and especially imams of mosques to motivate women to cast vote and husbands to encourage their wives to do so.

The EC have identified five areas of the country where women could not vote. These are Badarkhalia and Rajkhal in Chakoria thana of Cox's Bazar district. Jamat-e-Islami's Chakoria unit reportedly put restrictions on women's voting 15 years ago.

Women in Surat village in Jhenidah Sadar upazila did not cast vote in the last 44 years due to superstitions. Women in Choto Bighai and Pangasia villages in Patuakhali district never voted. Local religious leaders asked them not to vote.

Women in Magar village in Nalchiti of Jhalokathi district did not vote due to superstitions and restrictions from religious leaders.

In Raikot union in Langkolt upazila of Comilla district, women could not cast vote in the last 20 years due to prohibition from local ulema parishad backed by religious leaders.

The women and children's affairs ministry has asked its field level officials in their respective districts to visit the areas concerned and motivate women to cast vote this time.

High officials of the ministry were also present at the press conference.

Sissoo trees

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The disease spreads faster during dry season. The Conservator said that the Department of Forest in his region stopped selling sissoo saplings from their designated nurseries. The department is also advising villagers not to plant sissoo saplings any more.

Dr Wahed Baksha, a scientist and Additional Officer of the BFRI in Chittagong, said they are still doing research to find cause of the disease. He said they have already isolated a fungus known as *fufarium solani*.

"But this fungus, as it is known, is too weak to attack a grown up tree. It is a complex situation and we are exploring various scientific aspects to pinpoint the cause," Baksha said.

Baksha said there could be various causes for the disease, which is reportedly rampant also in Nepal and India. The BFRI is planning to launch a campaign in Kushtia, Jessore and other areas where such attack has been reported.

"This tree originated from Nepal. It is in existence in our country for more than half a century without any problem. We are trying to find out why it is happening now and why the infestation is restricted to one particular region," Baksha said.

David Preston

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said.

"These meetings were useful towards getting a clear picture about the preparations for the October 1 election. Having talked to him, we feel the mechanism for holding fair polls is in place."

"We also believe that the Bangladeshis are seriously interested to participate in the polls and expressing their choice of leaders and parties. They should be allowed to do so."

The Canadian high commissioner, however, said that the political parties needed to exercise more tolerance. "Tolerance is crucial for democracy to work, sustain and succeed. It is important that the losing parties accept the election results. They should gracefully concede electoral defeat."

Preston suggested that opposition lawmakers be made chair of some parliamentary standing committees. "That would give the opposition a more important role in the parliament."

When asked why the conclave of ambassadors and high commissioners is known as the Tuesday Group, he said the name has evolved over time. "We found that most of our meetings were held on Tuesdays. Besides in Bangla, Tuesday is an auspicious day."

The Canadian High Commission, he said, has been successful in demonstrating the efficacy of CNG-converted auto-rickshaws.

Thirty of these vehicles are already in operation and thousands could be converted in phases with assistance from the financial institutions, he said. "Conversion to CNG could be done at a cost of nearly 750 dollars. The cost could easily be recouped by the lending institutions."

Bangladesh is the single largest recipient of Canadian aid.

BNP briefs diplomats

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into every incident.

"But Awami League did not form any inquiry commission, and even did not make public the police reports," Prof B Chowdhury quoted his party delegation to have told the representatives of the donor countries and agencies.

Speaking about a mystery regarding all the incidents, the BNP leaders apprised the diplomats that "It is interesting to note that on some of these occasions the targeted persons escaped unhurt."

B Chowdhury mentioned a number of questions raised by the diplomats in a free-frank and cordial discussion that lasted around one hour.

Australian High Commissioner Robert Flynn wanted to know if BNP would accept the result after the election, whatever it is.

He said they had replied that BNP would accept the results if the election is free and fair. "But Awami League wants to foil the election several ways."

Ambassadors or representatives from USA, Canada, Britain, EU, Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Australia, Japan, the World Bank and NDI were present in the meeting.

On the BNP side were, among others, Syed Hasan Ahmed, Reaz Rahman, Rezaul Karim and Reazuddin Ahmed.

B Chowdhury said they also talked about election pledges of BNP, including improved law-and-order situation, independence of legislation and judiciary, autonomy of media, independent commission of anti-corruption, human rights commission and ombudsman, independence of election commission.

Describing law-and-order situation he informed the diplomats that there had been a spate of violence in the last few weeks, mostly related to pre-election activities.

"But some, especially more serious ones, may have been product of conspiracy carefully

hatched and implemented, as people apprehend," he said.

As the ambassadors pointed out that manifestos of BNP and Awami League are almost same, the BNP leaders told them that BNP had first announced its manifesto with a hope that the people will believe the BNP programme.

Regarding local observers in the polling centers, B Chowdhury said at first Awami League was against it but ultimately they had to concede to reason. "But they have since designed to field a very large number of pro-Awami NGO members as domestic observers."

Campaign

FROM PAGE 1
Everyday, the candidates set out on campaign quite often in a new fashion and with new pledges to win the heart of the electorate.

They deliver speeches near markets and at other points to win public support. Supporters as well as workers of the candidates are still distributing leaflets projecting their identities and pledges.

Innumerable black and white posters of two major political parties covered the walls, and replicas of election symbols galore the cityscape and camps were erected near roads, lanes and houses. Loudspeakers are letting out bel-lows of election-related songs.

Person-to-person electioneering is also on. Campaigners are approaching people belonging to different strata of society, while the party candidates are mobilising local youths and female workers going on door-to-door campaign.

Campaigning is reaching fever pitch in the capital, as the supporters of all contending candidates work into late night, setting out right from daybreak. Like other parts of the country, a festive mood gripped the city dwellers, especially those of the Old City, with the eighth parliamentary polls only four days away.

EC: Minorities

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press release, yesterday said such incident was not only unwanted but also hateful.

The Election Commission has asked the members of the law enforcing agencies to take immediate and exemplary action against those who have involvement in such incidents for the sake of a free and fair election.

According to the Representation of People Order, 1972, restraining or trying to restrain any voter from casting vote on account of his religion, caste, creed and tribe, is a punishable offence. The penalty for such offence is two to seven years of rigorous imprisonment.

Referring to the constitutional provision that discriminatory behaviour against any citizen is a clear violation of the constitution, the EC said it would take all possible steps so that none faces obstacle in casting vote.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission has requested the presiding, assistant presiding and polling officers to report to the respective returning officer and assistant returning officers in time for carrying out their assignments properly in their respective polling centers.

AL candidate

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Mostafa Kamal, a rebel, for refusal to withdraw his candidature and continuing campaign against party nominee from Chittagong-2 constituency ABMAbul Kashem.

Zillur Rahman also warned of disciplinary actions against others working beyond party decision.

Earlier on Saturday, AL chief Sheikh Hasina issued letters to 26 party rebels finally warning them to refrain from contesting the polls from their respective constituencies.

Party sources said some more are likely to be expelled in a day or two.

ETV transmission

FROM PAGE 1
Prof. Abdur Rob of the Department of Geography of DU.

The petitioners prayed for suspension of terrestrial broadcast of ETV by using the tower of Bangladesh Television (BTV) until the matter is settled in the court.

Barrister Abdur Razzak along with Advocate Joyanal Abedin and Advocate Golam Mohammad Chowdhury Alal moved for the petitioners, while Barrister Rafiqul Haque and Barrister Moniruzzaman moved for the ETV.

Attorney General Mahmudul Islam submitted before the court on behalf of the State.

The State and the ETV challenging the HC order filed two separate Civil Miscellaneous Appeals (CMP) with the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court.

The court is likely to hear the matter today.

Meanwhile, the Dhaka University Teachers' Association (DUTA) in a statement yesterday protested the move for the suspension of ETV's terrestrial transmission.

Prof. R.I.M. Aminur Rashid and Sharifullah Bhuiyan, the president and the general secretary of DUTA

respectively, accused a vested quarter of obstructing the free flow of information ahead of the general election.

The leaders praised the ETV for its role in reflecting hope and aspiration of the people through its transmission alongside the state-owned BTV.

They said the people highly appreciated the Election Commission for its permission to both ETV and BTV to broadcast election news.

They also denied the allegation of spending "additional amount of money" for election purposes and bringing workers from across the river.

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allegation of getting "extra money". "I get only Tk 125 per day from the candidate. I spend the amount for tea and entertaining workers," said Sirajul Islam, President of Moksudpur union Russell Smrity Sangsad.

"I do not get a single penny more," Siraj said. The Sangsad has a workforce of 45 youths who move in the area by rotation, he said.

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