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EC risks its wings clipped

Help from admin unlikely if UP polls not deferred

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday hinted that the Election Commission might not get any help from the administration if it stuck to its own schedule for the union parishad elections.

According to sources, there was also clear indication that the government might even curtail certain powers of the EC, should it turn down the request to defer the polls.

Industries Minister MK Anwar and Political Secretary to the Prime Minister Haris Chowdhury yesterday met Chief Election

Commissioner MA Syed, reiterating the government's request for deferment.

The government would be hard put to provide security coverage for the UP elections, should these be held between January 4 and February 27 as the EC wants, they told the CEC.

Also yesterday, the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development (LGRD) and Cooperatives sent a formal letter to the EC, reiterating its proposal for

deferment.

The constitutional body meets Saturday to consider the latest government proposal.

"If someone gives a proposal, it is not possible to take an instant decision on that issue," Syed told reporters after meeting Anwar and Haris. "We will certainly consider the government proposal."

Anwar, meanwhile, told newsmen that the government requested the EC once again to defer the polls in view of the logistic reality. "It will be difficult to ensure adequate

security with the countrywide clampdown on criminals going on."

The constitution makes it mandatory for the executive to provide logistic support to the EC whenever it decides to hold the election. However, in case of the government's refusal to do so, the EC cannot possibly do anything about that.

Meanwhile, several ministers

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Former air chief held in theft case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Former chief of the Bangladesh Air Force Air Vice-marshal (Retd) Jamal Uddin Ahmed, arrested in connection with a theft case on Wednesday, was sent to the Dhaka Central Jail yesterday.

Gulshan police took him to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM's) court, Dhaka at 2.00 PM yesterday. He was at the court hajat when his bail petition was moved.

In the bail petition the defence

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FM links Hasina visit to Sinha remarks

Dhaka dismisses Delhi's claim on al-Qaida network as baseless

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan yesterday dismissed Indian External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha's allegation of Dhaka's link with al-Qaida network as baseless and malicious.

Talking to reporters at his office,

Khan also linked opposition leader Sheikh Hasina's current visit to India with Sinha's comment and blamed her for sponsoring "anti-Bangladesh" campaign at home and abroad.

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M Morshed Khan

Army-cops scuffle halts traffic on Progoti Sarani

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Traffic movement on the Progoti Sarani remained snapped for over an hour as army troops and traffic policemen scuffled over allegation of a policeman's taking bribes yesterday afternoon.

The wrangle arose from an army patrol team's order to a traffic constable not to take 'bribes' from a bus driver.

The army team was caught in a traffic jam at the western end of the Kuril-Bishaw Road at about 3.45pm, when it was heading for the Dhaka Cantonment. The team allegedly

found the constable taking Tk 300 in bribes from the driver.

Army sources said the officer of the army team asked the constable to return the money and instead of giving the money back, he argued with the officer and called the on-duty traffic sergeant in.

The sergeant joined hands with the constable, resulting in a scuffle between troops and policemen. When the sergeant threatened a road blockade, the troops allegedly manhandled both (the constable and the sergeant) -- the incident that drew a large number of onlookers around.

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With the Eid-ul-Fitr round the corner, city shopping malls have been decorated with illuminations and attractive prizes are being offered on purchases. A number of new malls have sprung up in the city recently, mostly along the Mirpur Road, setting in competition among sellers.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



Campaigns of distortion

STAR REPORT

A number of Bangladeshi policymakers are campaigning in favour of gas export, coinciding with the Indian campaign of portraying Bangladesh as a safe heaven of militant Islamic groups and 'anti-Indian agents'.

If this propaganda offensive against Bangladesh succeeds, the local export industry will suffer a serious setback, according to exporters.

The Indian press and Unocal (US oil company) offices in India and Bangladesh have also released a number of news stories saying that

Bangladesh has almost finalised a positive decision in this regard. The decision might be announced by December, they said.

But the government had committed itself to dealing with this controversial issue through parliamentary discussions-- based on reports by two

national level committees on gas utilisation and gas reserve assessment.

Seven out of the nine members of the Gas Utilisation Committee believe that the current gas reserves

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NEWS ANALYSIS