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Discord in ruling alliance as IOJ names choice for by-polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An apparent discord crept into the ruling four-party alliance yesterday when one of its constituents unilaterally declared candidature for Netrakona-3 constituency in breach of the combine's understanding.

Minor coalition partner, the Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) led by Fazlul Haq Amini, announced Ehtesham Sarwar Chowdhury as its candidate for the by-election slated for August 21.

The announcement came from a hurriedly called press conference at the IOJ's Lalbagh office yesterday evening, when the BNP Parliamentary Board headed by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia was interviewing some 10 party leaders to choose party nominee.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Dr Kamal's reply to SQ Chy's lawyer

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a reply sent on Wednesday (July 16, 2003) to Barrister Rafiqul Haq, lawyer for Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, Dr Kamal Hossain, representing the editor of The Daily Star, wrote:

"The offending publication is not a verbatim report, as claimed by your client, but according to the Daily Inqilab, is a "corrected" text given by Mr Salauddin Quader Chowdhury and is "written by him". There is no denial by your client that the statements made by him were

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

NCBs lose to earn Tk 107 spent to get Tk 100

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) spend Tk 107 to earn Tk 100 because of excess operational costs and accumulated bad assets.

Rupali Bank spends Tk 136, Sonali Tk 99.19, Janata Tk 94.90 and Agrani Tk 96.43 to earn every one hundred taka, according to an earning analysis of the four NCBs till March 31, 2003.

NCB officials contribute this abnormally high cost to wastes, corruption and non-commercial operation.

The four NCBs had to set aside Tk 3,296 crore in suspense accounts because of bad portfolios. Otherwise, this amount would have been accounted for the

banks' earnings as interest on assets.

The officials said under such circumstances, the NCBs are unable to cut lending rates and make profits.

They said the trade union leaders of one bank illegally use 25 to 30 gallons of fuel every day for their own benefits. Similar allegations of abuse of bank property also go against the executives of the officers' associations. The finance ministry also liberally uses vehicles of the banks.

As examples of non-commercial attitude of the NCBs, a central bank comparison shows that the state-owned banks charge a minimum of Tk 500 as commission for bank guarantee while the private banks charge Tk 1,500 and the foreign banks Tk 2,500 for the

same service.

Because of such disparities in other services as well, while income other than interest accounts for 40 to 50 per cent of the earnings of the foreign and private banks, it hardly rakes 20 per cent of the NCB income.

Frequent waiver on interest, directed soft loans in agriculture and exports and free bill collection service to different government agencies like Titas, the Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board and Dhaka Electric Supply Authority also take toll on their cost-earning ratio.

Excess manpower -- one-third of the total force, as the Bank Reform Committee earlier said -- and loss-making branches also eat up a chunk of income.

New gas exploration starts on Block 9 from Oct 14

SHARIER KHAN

Breaking the stagnation in oil and gas exploration, foreign oil companies Tullow, Chevron and Texaco along with local operator BAPEX start drilling an exploratory well in Kashimpur, Comilla on October 14.

This will be the first drilling under the second round block bidding that virtually concluded two years ago. With it ended the venture of the Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration Company (BAPEX) as a partner of foreign oil

companies.

"The foreign investment in this venture will be a fresh shot in the arms of our gas sector," observes a Petrobangla source. He said the four partners will drill the second well in the Gumti river area one month after the Kashimpur operation under a production sharing contract (PSC) for Block 9 spreading over 6880km.

As per PSC signed on April 11, 2001, the oil companies will drill the third well in Block 9. The location is however not yet identified.

"We have two more potential areas where we can drill another well," said a Chevron-Texaco official. "It is either in Lalmai or in Chandpur. To decide on this issue, we are going to hold a meeting in Ireland soon."

Considered a highly prospective zone, Block 9 is situated at the heart of the gas pipeline network, a location that gives explorers a built-in advantage for explorers to mobilise equipment as well as to connect the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4



PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Wading through ankle-deep water, a girl walks home from the *maktab* (religious school) in Dhaka's Ahammedbag area submerged by rising floodwaters.

Changes in exams planned to raise standard of education

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

The government is planning to bring about changes in the public examination system to raise the standard of education, said State Minister for Education ANM Ehsanul Hoque Milon.

The changes will be brought to the teaching method, curricula, question patterns and teachers' performance monitoring in the wake of growing concern over nosedive of the standards.

A Tk 490 crore project funded by the Asian Development Bank

(ADB) is on to introduce school-based merit judgement system, he told The Daily Star.

In 100 marks, public examinations will be held for 70 and schools will give the remaining 30 marks in grading students, he said.

"For this, we need to train teachers so that they can judge students properly," he added.

There will be a check and balance to judge real merits, he said. Students will have to get similar

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

BNP leader with crime link gunned down in Old Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unidentified assailants shot dead an alleged criminal and ruling BNP leader, and injured his brother at the bustling Johnson Road in the old Dhaka yesterday noon.

Accused in at least 13 cases including six murders, Anwarul Haque Anu, 40, came under attack near the police club, about 100 yards away from the Dhaka Court Building.

Anwarul went to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court from his Mill Barrack residence at about 11:00am to appear in the Shawn Mohammad Rob murder case hearing, from where he along with a companion, Abul Kashem, was going to the Stadium Market.

"A group of 10-12 armed men waylaid his rickshaw, surrounded i

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1