

AL working

FROM PAGE 12 Committee, and a number of legal experts, academics and former bureaucrats are involved in the process.

AL Advisory Committee member and former Dhaka University Professor Shahmsul Huda Harun will place a set of draft proposals at a roundtable styled 'Reforms of caretaker government and electoral process for fair election' in the city on Monday, sources said.

Leaders of AL's allies and other opposition parties are likely to attend the programme and table their suggestions.

The main demand of the opposition appears to be for a provision in the Caretaker Government Act ensuring that a person acceptable to all heads the interim government.

"The main defect of the existing law on the matter is that the government can, by careful calculations and manipulations, put a man favourable to it and not neutral in office as chief adviser," said a senior AL leader.

AL leader Suranjit Sengupta expressed a similar view and said, "The government increased the service age-limit for the judges of higher courts only to have Justice KM Hasan as the head of the next caretaker government."

At a seminar on reforms of the caretaker government last week, Sengupta said the EC should have a secretariat of its own and financial autonomy.

Another senior AL leader, Tofail Ahmed, yesterday told the news agency UNB, "We are preparing our recommendations in consultation with all political parties."

He said they would neither participate in nor allow any 'mock election' like the one held on February 15, 1996.

The EC must be reformed and the next election commissioners acceptable to all, Tofail said.

He alleged that the BNP-Jamaat government is conspiring to hold a stage-managed election by appointing their own people as chief adviser to

caretaker government, chief election commissioner (CEC) and local administrators like deputy commissioners, police super, upazila nirbahi officers and officer-in-charges of police stations.

"The president is theirs, the chief adviser and the CEC will be appointed according to their choice. In such an arranged election, BNP will be the lone party. We are not going to take part in such mock polls and will not allow that in Bangladesh," the frontline AL leader said.

Rahmat Ali said, "Articles 120 and 126 of the constitution allow amendment to the caretaker government system."

Elaborating on their stance, he said "We will propose that not only a justice but a member of other professions, like lawyers, teachers and former bureaucrats, can also be a chief of the caretaker government, and he or she must be acceptable to all and neutral."

Ali said, "Apart from the formation of the interim government, our main demand is to strengthen the Election Commission."

"Appointment, transfer, promotion and punishment of all government employees should be under the jurisdiction of the Election Commission during the three months of the interim government," he added.

In October last year, a meeting of AL Central Working Committee discussed about the caretaker government system and maintained that some reforms of the system is necessary to ensure neutrality of the interim government in conducting the next general elections slated for early 2007.

Later, Leader of the Opposition and AL President Sheikh Hasina reiterated the demands several times.

But Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and her senior cabinet colleagues including Law Minister Barister Moudud Ahmed rejected outright the opposition's demand to amend the Caretaker Government Act.

Cops help

FROM PAGE 1 protesting the replacement of the signboard of their mosque. Addressing the press conference Justice KM Sobhan said the police acted against the constitution of the country.

Justice Sobhan said they will hold a meeting in Dhaka and will declare their next course of programme against the move of Khatme Nabuwat.

A team of Ekattorer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee led by justice Sobhan reached Bogra the day before yesterday in the wake of the bigots' threat to replace the signboard of the Ahmadiyya mosque.

Meanwhile, Khatme Nabuwat leaders said they will go for movement against the government if the Ahmadiyyas are not declared non-Muslim through passing a law in parliament by December 22. They also said Khatme Nabuwat will hold a grand rally in Dhaka on December 23 if their demand is not met.

JCD, BCL

FROM PAGE 12 bringing out a procession and campaigning on the college campus centring admission test of first year honours class.

About two hours later, Shibir activists, joined by their supporters from Government Alia Madrasa and other institutions, launched a counter-attack on JCD workers. BCL activists unexpectedly joined JCD workers in the fight against Shibir men, in which brick chips and clubs were used indiscriminately. Shibir men then retreated.

Violence erupted for the second time in presence of the Assistant Commissioner of Khulna Metropolitan Police Anisur Rahman and the officer-in-charge Khulna thana. They were heading a contingent of law enforcers deployed on and outside the campus following the clash earlier, locals alleged.

Jamaat-backed Shibir alleged JCD activists made the attack first without any provocation.

But city unit JCD President Masud Parvez Babu refuted the allegation and blamed Shibir for attacking their activists first.

Shafiqur Rahman Palash, President of city unit BCL, also refuted the allegation by Shibir.

No case was filed and no-one was arrested in this connection till yesterday evening.

Security on the campus was stepped up by deploying two platoons of police in riot gear.

Border calm

FROM PAGE 1 Meanwhile, Indian Constable Soma Munde, 35, arrested for his intrusion into and alleged espionage in Bangladesh, will be sent to Dhaka for interrogation by Interpol.

Singmari locals held him with a self-loaded rifle (SLR) on Thursday.

The ceasefire at Singmari border came into effect after a telephone conversation between Rangpur BDR Sector Commander Colonel Lutfar Rahman and acting Kuchibihar BSF Sector Commander PK Tripathy on Wednesday.

The situation at Ramgarh has also remained calm.

Meanwhile, separate company commander level meetings between Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) the BSF were held at bordering Mahimaganj in Kurigram and Ramgarh yesterday.

During the meetings, field level border officials of Bangladesh and India agreed to maintain peace along the border till the deputy director general level meeting between BDR and BSF is held on March 14.

The meetings were held to ease the tension following India's recent move to fence the border, that led to exchange of several thousand bullets between BDR and BSF on Wednesday

Meanwhile, BDR have been kept on alert at Singmari, Ramgarh and Mahimaganj, a top BDR official said.

"We have kept our forces on alert in the bordering areas in the face of BSF's attempt to put fence within 150 yards from the zero point in Indian side despite their assurance not to do so," said a BDR official.

The BSF assured the BDR officials of refraining from erecting fences along the Ramgarh border during the company commander level meeting, BDR sources said.

BNP, Jamaat men

FROM PAGE 12 hours until 4:00am in protest against police actions.

Hundreds of BNP-Jamaat activists ransacked Jubo League worker Dulal Sheikh's house and held him at the dictate of UP Chairman Baduzzaman Panna, said locals.

As Dulal informed police about Panna's secret move to bury a woman who died mysteriously in Dhaka on March 7, the UP chairman wanted to take revenge on him, they added.

On information, police rushed there and rescued Dulal. But the unruly activists vandalised a police van and injured a havidler. Two Jubo Dal activists were also injured.

The activists gave a 24-hour ultimatum for withdrawing a sub-inspector of Birganj Police Station.

CAG finds irregularities

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The CAG office rejected the EC's version and explanations on the recruitment, and affirmed that the objectivity of its findings has been proven beyond doubt, adding a detail investigation should be conducted into the irregularities.

The audit report has yet not been submitted to parliament. However, a source in the CAG office said they would place the report to the president to be tabled at parliament on time.

The CAG office in its report said, in a clear violation of the government rules and regulations for development projects, the CEC had appointed five consultants -- an international and two local Information Technology (IT) experts, a legal expert and a project implementation specialist -- disregarding opposition from the other Election Commissioners.

The opposition came as, corruption cases had been pending against both the local IT experts with the now defunct Bureau of Anti Corruption when they were appointed at the EC ahead of the national elections.

"The project authorities could get chance to play an effective role in implementation the project due to the intervention by the chief election commissioner," said the CAG office.

INT'LIT EXPERT

The CEC appointed Lionel Wollner as an international IT consultant to the EC on June 20, 2000 and Wollner continued the job until September 9, 2002. The EC paid him about Tk 2.48 crore for his services.

The CAG office said the three other election commissioners at an EC meeting on October 26, 2000 recommended cancelling the appointment, but the CEC did not agree with them.

Wollner who flew in Dhaka following an email sent by the CEC himself fixed his terms of reference (TOR) and work plan, which the CAG office found unacceptable from the point of view of accountability and transparency.

However, according to the TOR of his job, Wollner was supposed to develop some important software, the central database of EC and its administrative system. But he did not do any of that work: "He did not achieve any output at all," said the CAG office.

The CAG scrutiny also found false a claim that the database of 7.50 crore voters had been prepared with the sole initiatives of Wollner. "In fact, 77 vendors did the work of data entry on voters ahead of the national elections," the audit report said.

An IT expert team led by eminent expert Dr Zamilur Reza Chowdhury had earlier conducted a study and said there was no need to appoint any international IT expert for the work. But the CEC ignoring the recommendation appointed Wollner as IT expert.

"The allegations against the appointment of the international IT consultant has been proved, as the documents submitted by the EC could not substantiate it's claim against the allegation," said the audit report.

LOCAL IT EXPERTS

Ignoring existing rules of the project, qualifications for the appointment and severe opposition from the other three election commissioners, the CEC appointed Moinalu Haque on September 7, 2000 as a system

analyst at the EC.

The project steering committee had not such decision to appoint local consultant. The national project director did not make any request to the CEC for the appointment, said the CAG office.

Moinalu earlier worked at the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) when MA Syed was its chairman. The CEC also did not take permission from the SEC or the finance ministry before appointing Moinalu at his commission.

The lowest qualification for the post was a bachelor's degree on IT. But Moinalu had no such qualification, said the CAG report.

Referring to the irregularities of ignoring the recruitment system, the other election commissioners opposed the appointment and asked to cancel it.

"The appointment was totally illegal and when he was appointed at the EC, a corruption case was going on against him," said the CAG report.

Though Moinalu could not work efficiently and effectively, he was paid Tk 18.60 lakh, said the report.

The CEC ignoring the opposition of the other election commissioners also appointed another local IT consultant, Emdadul Haque, on June 4, 2001 and paid Tk 14.33 lakh for his six-month service.

When Emdadul was appointed in the EC, a criminal case was going on against him at the recently defunct Bureau of Anti Corruption, said the CAG report, but it did not specified the about the case.

After completion of his job, Emdadul submitted a report to the project authorities, which rejected it, as the report was not a standard one, said the CAG office.

LEGAL EXPERT

The CEC that time appointed Justice Abdul Quddus Chowdhury as a legal expert before the electoral law amendment ahead of the general elections 2001.

Though upon receiving a letter from the CEC in this regard the UNDP gave its consent to the appointment but the steering committee of the UNDP-funded project did not approve it.

No tender or circular was made to appoint the expert. Chowdhury also did not submit report to the project authorities as per the TOR of his job.

Justice Chowdhury, who was appointed for 11 months from February 1, 2001, was paid Tk 36.53 lakh for his unspecified consultancy, said the CAG office.

It may be mentioned that when the CEC was the SEC chair, Justice Chowdhury was a legal consultant to the SEC.

P R O J E C T I M P L E M E N T A T I O N S P E C I A L I S T

The CEC also appointed Dr Zahurul Alam as a project implementation specialist on July 1 without making any circular in the newspapers for the appointment.

Zahurul worked at the EC for six months and was paid Tk 11.99 lakh. But he submitted an incomplete report on his assignment in accordance with the TOR of his job. The project authorities did not accept the incomplete report, said the CAG office.

The CAG probe did not find his activities as satisfactory, too.

A river run

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Elsewhere, the river is being strangled in order to give birth to an entire new city Purbachal, which the Rajdhani Unnayan Katirpakkh RAJUK is building on 6,000 acres of land covering Dhaka Narayanganj and Gazipur districts. Hundreds of barges can be seen carrying sand from the River Meghna and Munshiganj areas to fill in low lands.

As a consequence of the gradual encroachment, the river, which originates from the Lakkhna and Old Brahmaputra in Mymensingh and flows to Shitalakhya, has become so narrow that goods-carrying vessels often get stuck on the riverbed. During winter, it virtually shrinks to a small canal.

Lakhs of people living on the banks of the 21-kilometer long river are also facing a serious water crisis since they can no longer use the river water for daily tasks, such as bathing and washing clothes.

Even ten years ago, the river water was clean and usable for various household purposes. Fishermen netted big fish on the river all year round, the villager Mian said. But now hardly any fish can survive in the polluted water, he recalled.

"We cannot even wash our legs in the river because it causes itching," said Mahbubul Alam of the same village. He said cultivation of vegetables on the land along the river is also being affected because of pollution in the water.

Sources say the river is being poisoned because sewage water from Dhaka city flows into it via the Rampura Khaal, spreading throughout the whole area through arteries and various canals.

A high ranking engineer from Dhaka WASA admitted responsibility for polluting the river Balu and several hundred villages along it. But he added that unscrupulous home and industry owners on an

Greens for saving Buriganga from pollution

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Environment activists yesterday put forward a set of demands to save the Buriganga river from extinction, after inspecting the pollution and encroachment situation of the river travelling by boat from Soarghat in the city to Ashulia.

Buriganga Bachao Andolon (Save Buriganga Movement, BBA), a wing of the Bangladesh Parishad Andolon (Bapa), organised the tour to drum up support for its demands to save the Buriganga as well as Turag, Balu and Shitalakhya rivers.

"The rivers around the capital are nearly dead. For the greater interests of the nation and the future generations, the Buriganga and all other rivers have to be protected from pollution and encroachment," eminent economist Prof Muzaffer Ahmad said while inaugurating the programme, according to a Bapa press release.

Ahmad said the government should take immediate measures to bring all the rivers back to their actual appearance.

Serious industrial and household wastes have been polluting the water and land grabbers choking the channel of the rivers, most grievously in the case of Buriganga, for long.

After the tour, BBA leaders including its Member Secretary Mihir Bishwas put forward the set of demands at a view-exchange meeting with newsmen.

The demands include implementation of the recommendations made by the Buriganga taskforce, making the circular waterway operational, evicting all encroachers immediately, recovering the 37 canals, and constructing roads and planting trees on both the banks of Buriganga.

The BBA also wanted the authorities concerned to prevent dumping of all sorts of wastes into the rivers, conserving their navigability and protecting all water bodies from pollution.

China close to production of 'safe' genetic rice

REUTERS, Hong Kong

As early as this year, China could start commercial production of a new breed of genetically engineered rice.

If adopted, it would be the world's first large-scale plantation of a major transgenic food crop and, some scientists say, would provide an environmentally friendly answer to the food problems of the world's poor.

But those who fear that genetically modified organisms (GMOs) present a danger to the natural crop balance say Beijing's haste to develop the rice has more to do with a drive to bring the income levels of its farmers in line with others who have prospered more from China's red-hot economic development.

Scientists in China, the world's top rice producer and consumer, say Beijing is looking to mass produce Xa21 rice, which contains a gene from an African wild rice.

3 more dead

FROM PAGE 12 to Spain with the government clearance, but we cannot do anything for those who are living here illegally."

He said, "No one in fact comes here to go back, but to stay."

Meanwhile, Swapan Khan, one of the 15 Bangladeshis undergoing treatment at an Algerian hospital, yesterday told the BBC that they want the Bangladeshi government to bring them back home as soon as possible.

Narrating the terrible ordeal they had been through, Swapan told the BBC how his fellow brothers starved to death one after another on the way to Spain from Morocco.

He said their 26-member team started from Dhaka, arrived in Dubai Airport by air and from there they were taken to a place unknown to them. Then the brokers took them by cars forcibly and boarded them on a boat towards Spain.

Kibria killing

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They were shown arrested on Wednesday in two cases connected with Kibria's killing.

Earlier, the accused were taken on remand several times and interrogated extensively by the Joint Interrogation Cell.

The former finance minister was killed in a grenade attack on January 27 at Baiddar Bazar in Laskarpur union of Habiganj district.

Nizami alleges

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and one such election in 1996 put AL in power. But, "Apprehending debacle in future elections, they are now raising the demand for recasting the caretaker government. Their demand is completely illogical."

Nizami also said an 'identified evil force' is trying to brand Bangladesh as a dysfunctional, militant and fundamentalist state. "The conspirators are raising slogans of militancy and fundamentalism to destroy Islam and the Muslims," he claimed.

Jamaat leaders Makbul Ahmad, Maulana Abdus Sobhan MP, Delwar Hossain Sayeedi MP and Mohammad Qamaruzzaman also spoke at the conference chaired by Abu Naser Mohammad Abduzzaher.

Suicide bombing

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the Mosul representative for radical Shia leader Moqtada Sadr.

Shia cleric Sayed Jassem Mohamed recalled the moment when the explosion shredded a jammed funeral tent at 5:20 pm (1420 GMT).

"A ball of fire shot out, followed by falling debris, and panic swept the outdoor tent next to the Sadreen mosque," Jassem said.

"Volunteers started to put out the flames while others evacuated the dead and the wounded from the middle of the tent, which was destroyed by the blast."

Rescuers had to walk through puddles of blood and human remains.

Mosques and local television urged people to give blood, while families thronged the general hospital through the night to identify their dead.

Doctors put the dead at 50 and the wounded at 81.

In Mosul, residents expressed their anger.

"Who pretends this is holy war.

The authors of this cowardly attack are looking to destroy Iraq and push it into the abyss," said Jalal Qassem, a doctor.

Sunni Muslim Arabs, perceived as the elite under Saddam Hussein's regime, make up about half of Mosul's 1.5 million population, while the rest are divided among Kurds, Turkmen, Shias, Christians and other groups.

The city is a stronghold of Islamic militant fighters and former regime loyalists. It has been gripped by violence since November when rebels launched an offensive and police abandoned their posts.

The government claimed on Thursday that it has killed or captured 18 of the top lieutenants of al-Qaeda's Iraq frontman, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, except for his man in Mosul, Abu Talha.

Zarqawi, Iraq's most wanted fugitive, with a 25 million dollar bounty on his head, has branded Shias as "Jews and traitors" and vowed to target them.

The latest blow for Iraq's majority Shias came as their political alliance, which swept the elections, was putting the final touches on a deal with the Kurds to form a coalition ahead of the new parliament's first session next Wednesday.

Both communities were poised for a taste of real power after being oppressed for decades under

AL, allies to form

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intersection, Kalabagan, Russell Square, Asad Gate and Kalyanpur.

Like the previous two human chains, this will also not disturb traffic movement as the participants will not occupy the roads and highways, opposition leaders said.

The programme was announced on March 2, as part of a series of similar agitation programmes of the opposition camp, including a dawn-to-dusk hartal on March 27, "hunger processions" across the country on March 23 protesting price hike of essentials, and countryside demonstration on March 20 against rise of extremist groups.

Urging people from all walks of life to join the programme, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil yesterday said people will show no confidence in the BNP-Jamaat-led coalition for another time tomorrow.

In December last year, the opposition parties formed two cross-country human walls—one from Teknaf to Tentulia and another from the Sundarbans to Sunamganj.

Business community, development partners as well as common people have appreciated the opposition's human wall programmes to raise their concerns as an alternative to hartal.

A study report of the United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP) released last Thursday also recommended all parties to avoid hartal and use programmes like human chain to protest.

The AL and its allies—Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, National Awami Party and the left-leaning 11-party alliance that includes Communist Party of Bangladesh, Workers Party and Gono Forum—had announced the simultaneous agitation against the ruling alliance on November 18 last year with a common nine-point charter of demands.

The key demand of the opposition is an end to the coalition government and holding free and fair elections under a non-party, neutral caretaker government after reforming the existing electoral system. Another major demand is ousting the war criminals from the cabinet to free the country from religious militant groups. The demands also include inquiry into all grenade and bomb blasts, and arrest and punishment of those involved in the Chittagong and Bogra arms hauls.

"We are ready to share our experience and, hopefully, this will help Nepal," Islamabad's outgoing ambassador here Zamir Akram said in an interview published Friday in the state-run Rising

"So, we are ready to help in whatever way we can. Pakistan is also facing terrorist threats on our western border. We have developed some kind of expertise, especially in the use of high-tech equipment by the terrorists," he told the state-run English daily.

"We, within the Saarc level and at the bilateral level, have offered an exchange of information," he added, referring to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) which groups Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

"We have offered possibilities of training. We are also ready to provide arms if that is required by Nepal."

Nepal, calling the king's power grab an "internal" matter. Analysts have said Gyanendra's seizure of power has overtones of Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf's coup in 1999. Musharraf argued that the world should back him rather than give a boost to Islamic radicals.

After seizing power, Gyanendra said he acted to save Nepal from falling into chaos as a result of a failure by political parties to end the insurgency.

Non-Muslims

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Muslim Ummah (community) will not abide by any decision of the High Court (about Ahmadiyyas), rather they will fight until the end to establish Islamic laws in the country, they said at the International Khatme Nabuwat Conference '05 at Paltan Maidan in the capital yesterday.

Critising the government for not declaring the Ahmadiyyas non-Muslim, chief of a faction of Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) Shaikhul Hadith Azizul Hoque said, "It (government) lacks courage to declare Ahmadiyyas Kafir (non-Muslim). Those who do not consider Kadiyanis as Kafir are themselves Kafir."

The chief of the IOJ, a component of the ruling four-party alliance, said the government inaction on the issue shows it has no confidence in the people.

The government will face trouble if it does not declare Kadiyanis non-Muslim, said IMTKNB President and Khatib of Baitul Mokarram National Mosque Obaidul Haque.

The people must stand united against Kadiyanis so that they cannot cheat the Muslims in the name of Islam, Obaidul Haque said. "Kadiyanis should be declared non-Muslim for their own safety. Otherwise conscious Muslims may offend them."

IMTKNB Publicity Secretary Maulana Mohiuddin Rabbani termed Dr Kamal Hossain a 'mediator for Kadiyanis' for filing a case with the High Court against the ban on Ahmadiyya publications.

"We will violate any orders of the High Court about Ahmadiyyas and follow the laws of Allah," Rabbani said.

Prof Shayekh Assaffi, a religious leader from Egypt, urged leaders of the Muslim countries to unitedly fight against the Kadiyanis.

Fazlul Hoque Amini, chief of a faction of the IOJ, party lawmaker Mufi Shahidul Islam, IMTKNB Secretary Maulana Nurul Islam, leaders of Khelafat Andolan, Khelafat Majlish and Jama'atul Ulama Islam and Madina Editor Mohiuddin Khan also reiterated the demand for declaring Ahmadiyyas non-Muslim.

Other central leaders of the IMTKNB and representatives of its district units also made the same demand.

Maulana Nurullah and Masudul Hassan, two representatives of the organisation from Britain, also spoke at the conference attended by around 5,000 activists.

Non-Muslims, mostly Christians and Jews, are supporting the Kadiyanis all over the world, especially in London, where the headquarters of the community is located, said Nurullah.

The IMTKNB decided to observe 'agitation day' on April 8 across the country, and submit a memorandum to the prime minister in the last week of April.

It will also organise six divisional conferences in the next six months and a National Representatives' Conference in May in Dhaka.

Powerful bomb

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Colonel Iftekhar went to the spot and kept the bomb in water to make it inactive.

The bomb, which was joined to a pair of cables, was possibly a time bomb, police said, adding that the army explosive experts did not blast it as it might be very powerful.

Germany offers dialogue

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believe that Bangladesh is immune, Andreas said it is important to work together in the international field against terrorism. And it is also important that each government does its "homework to fight against terrorism in a credible way". He felt that "allowing a climate of impunity would endanger the very basis of any democratic state".

The