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PRESIDENTIAL AMNESTY

Moudud blames it on home ministry

Staff Correspondent

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed yesterday said his ministry would have opposed the recent presidential amnesty to a convict, had it known that two other people convicted of the same charge of murder had already been executed.

Disclaiming his ministry's involvement in sparing Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leader Mohiuddin Jintu from being hanged, Moudud blamed the home ministry for concealing the fact, which eventually earned Jintu the amnesty.

"If the home ministry mentioned in the case summary [prepared for Jintu's amnesty] that two others have already been executed, we would have already been executed," he said.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

EC grapples with too many parties

Says mushrooming trend must go for proper polls management

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Political parties have mushroomed since the independence, raising the number ahead of the next parliamentary election to 111 from 14 in the first general election in 1973.

Expressing dismay at the 'alarming' growth of political parties, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz said the trend must be contained.

"One-man parties cannot be allowed to take part in the parliamentary elections and to exclude them, registration of the political parties with the Election Commission should be made mandatory," he told reporters at his office yesterday.

Of the 111 political parties, over 90 do not have the least base of support among the public and their activities were practically non-existent over the years. Still, whenever the national election nears, they rush to the Election Commission (EC) staking their claims as political parties.

Except Awami League (AL), BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami, most of the parties could not field candidates in substantial number of constituencies in successive elections, according to EC documents of the previous elections.

Participation of such a large number of political parties makes the election management and other jobs in the run-up to the election very difficult.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

CEC to ask govt soon for independent secretariat

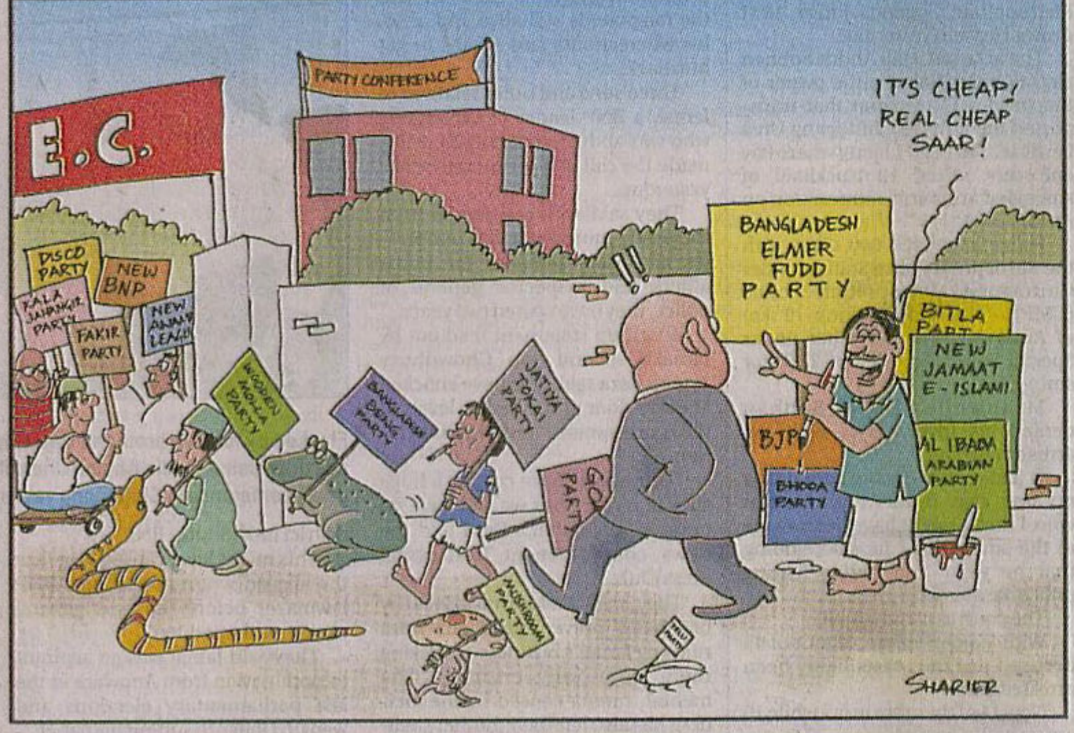
Staff Correspondent

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz yesterday said he will send a proposal to the government soon for setting up an independent secretariat for the Election Commission (EC).

He will also demand that the EC should get back the authority to cancel candidature for gross irregularities and initiate contempt proceedings against any person for violation of the EC's directives.

"I will send proposals asking the government to provide the Election Commission secretariat with absolute financial and administrative independence," Aziz told reporters yesterday at his office.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3



JOURNO KILLING

35 accused in charge-sheet acquitted

Staff Correspondent, Khulna

A Khulna court yesterday acquitted all the 35 charge-sheeted accused in the daily Anirvan journalist Shukur Hossain murder case.

Judge Kabita Khanam of the Court of Additional District and Sessions Judge delivered the judgement in presence of eight accused at 4:00pm.

Shukur, Dumuria upazila correspondent of the daily published from Khulna city, was abducted by extremists on July 5, 2002 from his house.

A case was filed with Dumuria Police Station on July 10 in this connection.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 2

Govt mulls life term to check adulteration

PINAKI ROY

The penalty for food adulteration is such a piffling amount under current measures that adulterators are hardly being punished, prompting the government to amend the decades old 'Pure Food Ordinance-1959'.

Following a directive from the high level of government, a team will soon sit to draft an amendment allowing for harsher punishment including life term imprisonment, sources concerned said.

Currently, the two recently formed mobile courts have been punishing culprits under four laws--

BSTI amended Act-2003, the City Corporation Act, the Pure Food Ordinance-1959 and section 273-274 of the Bangladesh penal code. Authorities say, however, that all four of the laws lack sufficient teeth to cause real damage.

"We have been dealing with four laws but none of them is effective enough to punish the big fishes," said one magistrate from the mobile court.

The government recently formed two mobile courts to stop food adulteration and punish perpetrators after the publication of "Eating dangerously," a series of reports in The Daily Star regarding food adulteration. After formation of the mobile courts, two teams have been conducting a drive under two magistrates in the city for the last month. They have so far doled out more than one million taka in fines, filed more than two hundreds cases, and jailed nearly two hundred people in connection with adulteration.

Related sources said that fines under the current penalty measures are too small in comparison to the huge amounts of money reaped by adulterators by their malpractice, and the government has taken the matter seriously to stop the culprits.

"When someone is earning 100,000 taka in a day, a fine of 10,000 taka is not a deterrent," said one source.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Benapole port users threaten indefinite strike

UNB, Benapole

Bangladeshi users of Benapole land port, which is already paralysed by the Indian truckers' strike, have threatened to go for an indefinite strike from July 28 to press their 12-point demand.

Leaders of five port users' associations declared their demands at a press conference yesterday.

Their demands include abolition of valuation and classification committees, fixing duty on the basis of CIF value and cancellation of weighing of imported consignments at three points.

The associations are Clearing & Forwarding (C&F) Agents

SEE PAGE 15 COL 2

TENGRATILA BLOWOUT

Niko skirts plan to drill relief well

SHARIEF KHAN

Canadian company Niko will not begin the drilling of the relief well in Tengratila as per schedule from today as it is now planning to drill a well in an opposite direction to collect geological data about the affected gas reserve there, industry insiders and ministry sources said.

To pacify the public pressure, Niko will initially spud the surface at a location 540 meters of the blowout Tengratila well. It will then keep the rig on standby, but will not drill further. Instead, it will conduct a three-dimensional (3D) study of the gas resources there, sources added.

However the joint committee under Niko and Bapex's Joint Venture Agreement (JVA) has not approved this plan, while energy ministry adviser Mahmudur Rahman verbally gave Niko the green signal, a competent ministry source pointed out.

Niko argues that the 3D survey will make the drilling of the relief well successful and risk-free.

But industry insiders view this

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Most areas in Ctg still without power

Probe body formed

Staff Correspondent, Ctg

Most areas of the port city were still without power yesterday, although the authorities managed to restore supply in a few areas after repairing one of the transformers that tripped on Saturday afternoon.

The Power Development Board (PDB) engineers repaired the transformer at Khulshi substation at around 12:00am, nearly 10 hours after the accident that left more than 20 lakh people in the city without power.

PDB Chief Engineer of Chittagong Region M Basiruzzaman

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A critically ill neurosurgical patient receives treatment lying in the crowded corridor between wards 30 and 31 at the DMCH against all medical norms.

DMCH 'death trap'

105 out of 295 died at neurosurgical unit alone in 45 days

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MAHBUBA ZANNAT

Patients here lie crowded in the corridor beside resident cats and visiting skunks, risking occasional stampedes and rainwater bringing in germs and filth from a perpetually overflowing garbage bin adjacent to the ward.

In Ward 30 that houses neurosurgical, in other words highly vulnerable, patients at Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) the environment is more killing than a healing one.

Of the total 295 patients on the hospital's police register who died between June 1 and July 15, Ward 30 alone accounts for 105, illustrating the horror of the situation.

The ward is grimy, lacks space and is dogged by comings and goings of throngs of outsiders including brokers, drug addicts, medicine salesmen, too many attendants and untimely visitors.

Unlike abroad, where a neurosurgical ward is typically dealt with much caution, at DMCH it is but one of the most neglected wards, although placed in the emergency block. The 23-foot by 45-foot ward is also the smallest in the hospital. With a 22-patient capacity, it has to house at least 40 to as much as 80 patients at a time. The number of admission seekers is so high that the

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

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EPZ LABOUR RIGHT DEARTH

Dhaka tries hard to save US GSP

REAZ AHMAD

Dhaka is making hectic efforts to save the generalised system of preference (GSP) facility offered by the USA from being axed as demanded by a heightened global campaign for lack of trade union rights in the country's export processing zones (EPZs).

As a US labour rights group in late June asked the US government to discontinue the GSP facility to Bangladesh, the Bangladesh government has engaged itself in hurried parleys with both the rights group and Washington, official sources told The Daily Star yesterday.

As part of the dialogues to keep the GSP facility intact, government representatives yesterday met with a top-ranking local representative of the American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO) in Dhaka. Another meeting with US Chargé d'Affaires Judith Chamas is slated for today.

In late last month, the AFL-CIO submitted a petition to the office of the US Trade Representative, objecting to what it said were poor labour rights in Bangladesh EPZs. It said trade unionism is prohibited at the EPZs and asked the Bush Administration to switch off the GSP facility to Bangladesh until 'full freedom of association' is established in the EPZs.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

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