

EU team seeks

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The morning and inquired whether there is any threat on holding the election, particularly from the militant. The home ministry, however, told them that there is no such threat adding that the government has successfully fought off militancy.

"We've assured them that they will receive necessary security if the government allows them to observe the polls," Safar Raj told reporters after the meeting. Upon arrival, the EU observers should contact the home ministry and deputy commissioners concerned and collect pass and stickers while going to the polling centres, he added.

The home secretary said, "We've told them that many foreign election observers, journalists and rights activists came earlier to observe the elections and got necessary security....Although there were movements, the parliamentary elections have been held smoothly since 1991."

Safar Raj also briefed the EU team about the security on the election day saying that police and ansar will be deployed at each polling centre to maintain law and order, while the Armed Police Battalion and Bangladesh Rifles men will act as striking force as per requirement of the EC.

"We've told them that the key militant leaders have been arrested and awarded death penalty in trials and the High Court has upheld the verdict," the home secretary said about the EU mission's inquiry about possible militant threats on election.

Talking to journalists after the meeting, the EU mission leader Bruce said they have been collecting necessary information from authorities concerned in

Iraq violence kills 28

AFP, Baghdad

At least 28 people were killed across Iraq on Monday, including four members of a Shia family shot dead by gunmen as they attempted to flee their homes north of Baghdad.

After receiving repeated threats in their home in the restive provincial capital of Baquba, the family packed their belongings in a pickup truck and fled, only to be stopped on the road by gunmen who riddled their car with bullets, killing four and wounding five.

Gunmen also killed two other Shias busy packing up their belongings in a small town just to the west of Baquba, while 10 other people, three of them soldiers, were killed elsewhere in Diyala, a province where sectarian violence has escalated only by that in Baghdad.

The violence came even as the Iraqi government gave an optimistic assessment of the impact of a massive security operation in the capital and the return of displaced families to newly pacified neighborhoods.

"We have statistics from the army unit in Ghazaliyah that some families have come back to their neighborhoods," said Iraqi military spokesman Brigadier Qassem al-Mussawi, referring to a largely Sunni Arab neighborhood of the capital.

Tens of thousands of Iraqi and US security personnel have deployed on the streets of Baghdad since June in a bid to stem tide-for-tat sectarian violence between the ousted sunni Arab elite and the newly empowered Shia majority that has been daily costing dozens of lives.

In the past week, however, the violence has spiked with dozens of bodies turning up everyday, including 14 in the heart of the capital alone on Monday.

"These numbers announced by the media are not accurate," retorted government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh when asked about the worsening death toll.

S Korea

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exploration opportunities, Seoul's energy ministry said yesterday.

South Korean companies are planning to set up an office with the Bangladesh state-run Petrobangla early next year, said the ministry of Commerce, Industry and Energy.

Details of the exploration plan are yet to be discussed.

High security

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In contrast to the law enforcers' usual suppressive attitude observed toward agitation programmes of the opposition, especially the siege programmes on September 6 and 12, the government yesterday took all measures to maintain a peaceful atmosphere in the capital.

Except for some stray incidents on the outskirts of the city and in several districts, yesterday's rally ended peacefully with full cooperation from the law enforcers as they let processions march through the streets towards the rally.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) took charge of the security of Paltan Maidan and the stage area a day ahead of the rally and handed over the charge to the police yesterday noon.

Rab took all preventive measures for the security of the rally except patrolling the sky with choppers.

Around 3,500 elite anti-terror forces from five battalions took over the Paltan Maidan and adjacent strategic points and repeatedly scanned through the area with bomb detectors, bomb sniffing dogs and explosives experts to avert any sort of untoward incident during the rally.

Undercover personnel from Rab intelligence and other law enforcement agencies including detective branch and special branch were deployed in the area to nab any

RU students

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on the Dhaka-Rajshahi highway near the university main entrance demanding uninterrupted power supply in all residential halls on the campus, campus sources said.

Numbers of vehicles were stranded on the highway for about two hours causing severe traffic congestion, said the sources.

Since 11:00pm, the police and the demonstrating students clashed many times and chase-counter chase lasted for three hours.

Hundreds of resident students from Sher-e-Bangla, Bangabandhu and Motihar halls came out of their dorms infuriated after they had experienced eight power outages since evening on Sunday, sources said.

Mansur Alam, a resident student of Bangabandhu hall, said severe power outages have been going on for about a month that is affecting the students' studies.

The students threatened to launch a greater agitation against the university authorities if smooth power supply is not ensured within 24 hours.

RUV Prof Altaf Hossain yesterday confirmed the incident and told the Daily Star that a section of student organisations are behind the frequent violence on campus. "We called a teacher body meeting yesterday night to find the attackers and to solve the existing power crisis."

Hasina

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voted to power in the next election.

Hasina, also president of main opposition AL, was addressing a grand rally organised by the 14-party opposition combine at Paltan Maidan in the capital to press home its demand for electoral reforms, and to protest price hike of essentials and rise of militancy.

"If we come to power we will reduce price of everyday essentials, curb militancy totally and increase power production and bring real infrastructure development in roads, schools, mosques and madrasas," she said, adding that their development will be for the people, not for any family.

The AL president blasted the BNP-Jamaat government for price spiral of essentials, rise of militancy, widespread corruption, looting public money through syndication and failure to increase power production and bring infrastructure development in the country.

Hasina said she would return people the money 'looted' by the prime minister and her sons if AL is voted to power.

She urged the prime minister to reduce the price of everyday essentials ahead of the holy Ramadan.

AL, BNP

FROM PAGE 1
In an unscheduled debate Awami League (AL) lawmaker AKM Jahangir Hossain alleged that the Election Commission (EC) started its activities preparing for the next general election violating the People's Representative Order 1972.

Denying the allegation Law Minister Moudud Ahmed said the allegation is absolutely baseless, the EC did not do anything like that but is working for holding the next general election in a free and fair manner in accordance with the laws and constitution.

AL and BNP lawmakers were shouting blames at each other while the law minister was trying to refute the opposition's claim.

After the question answer session AL lawmaker Rohomot Ali took the floor on point of order and brought a condemnation motion regarding the pope's remarks on Islam. In reply, Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar told the House that he had already received a notice regarding the matter and a decision will be taken later.

Soon after Rohomot Ali, AKM Jahangir Hossain took the floor and said, "The EC started the work of finalising the list of presiding and polling officers for the next election violating rules. It can be done only after announcing the election schedule and the returning officers are supposed to do it."

The speaker in his ruling on the subject said, "I cannot make any ruling on it. But if you think that a rule has been violated by the EC then you can go to the High Court."

Rejecting the allegation, Law Minister Moudud Ahmed said, "Jahangir will not be able to show any document on it. It is absolutely baseless what he has said." He however said, "The EC is doing everything according to the law and constitution. But, Awami League tried to make a political controversy out of it." The ruling BNP lawmakers shouted in support of him.

AL lawmakers protested when the minister politically attacked the opposition but he continued his speech.

Again taking the floor AKM Jahangir Hossain alleged that the law minister himself violated the rule. Criticising the EC he said, "This is the EC which violated the High Court verdict. It wants to politicise everything before the ninth parliament election."

Again rejecting the allegation Moudud Ahmed said, "We challenge the allegation, if he has any such order or notification against the Election Commission he should place it in the parliament."

Protesting the minister's speech AL lawmaker demanded the floor again but the speaker moved onto other businesses of the day without allowing them to have the floor.

Top 4 defaulters

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with the BB back in March. The central bank then identified that defaulted loans from these banks had increased with the top 20 defaulters. The banks are Sonali, Shilpa, Islami, National, City, Southeast, Premier, Dutch-Bangla, Jamuna and Brac.

Of these, Sonali Bank alone has the highest Tk 7,563 crore defaulted loan and Jamuna Bank has the lowest Tk 7.48 crore.

In Sonali Bank, the top 20 defaulters have Tk 3,400 crore loan, which is 45 per cent of the bank's total defaulted loan in March. Of these defaulters, the BPC held Tk 2,500 crore loan, BTMC Tk 143 crore, ASS Tk 83 crore and KNM Tk 72 crore.

Again, the BPC's defaulted loan increased to Tk 4,300 crore with this bank in June.

The bank is troubled with the KNM default loan as this state-owned enterprise has remained shut for years. The government however has decided to sell out the KNM property and clear its loans, sources said.

The ASS loan was given a decade back against a government guarantee. But hardly any repayment of the loan was made.

Faced with liquidity crisis, Sonali Bank has requested the central bank to take up with the government repayment of the

defaulted loans.

Out of the Shilpa Bank's total defaulted loan of Tk 426 crore, the top 20 defaulters are holding Tk 356 crore or 83 percent. The bank authorities told the BB that some of the top defaulters have recently regularised their loans through re-scheduling.

Of the Tk 366 crore total defaulted loans with the Islami Bank, the top 20 defaulters hold Tk 160 crore or 44 percent of the total.

National Bank has a total defaulted loan of Tk 202 crore, of which top defaulters are holding 64 percent or Tk 130 crore.

City Bank has Tk 152 crore defaulted loan, of which top defaulters hold Tk 133 crore or 87 percent.

Southeast Bank has a total defaulted loan of Tk 145 crore, of which Tk 106 crore or 73 percent with the top defaulters.

Premier Bank's defaulted loan totals Tk 96 crore. Of this, top defaulters are holding Tk 74 crore or 77 percent.

Dutch Bangla Bank has defaulted loan of Tk 38 crore, of which top defaulters hold 34 crore or 89 percent. Brac Bank has Tk 36 crore defaulted loan with Tk 3.5 crore or 11 percent of it with held by defaulters. Jamuna Bank has Tk 7.48 crore defaulted loans. Of this, top defaulters hold Tk 6 crore or 85 percent.

Mirpur crime dons

FROM PAGE 16
keeping accounts of the extorted money. Another unit rents houses for the gang members in different areas of Mirpur.

Mahmudur Rahman Soheli, a third year Accounting student of Dhaka University, is the chief of IT section and Shahadat's cousin Mannan is responsible for the overall supervision, said arrested Soheli.

Some members of the gang go to mosques, offer prayers and collect mobile numbers and other information of local traders and wealthy men.

In addition to monthly salaries ranging from Tk 4,000 to Tk 8,000, the gang members get travel allowance and dearness allowance, the arrestees said. Besides, they got a good amount of commission after collection of toll.

Before an operation, the members are given firearms that are brought from Savar and Dhamrai areas where those are kept hidden with some gang members. After the operation the firearms are sent back to the people concerned.

They carry out the killing operations after Shahadat gives them the final signal, the arrestees said, adding that they used to send a big

portion of extorted money through hundi to their top boss Shahadat who is hiding in India with 15 top members of the gang.

They said their gang leaders have been carrying out the killing and extortion by maintaining good relations with some dishonest officials of Rapid Action Battalion, DB and police.

DB Joint Commissioner Shohidul Islam, however, said on Saturday that he has no such information. He would take action against the corrupt policemen if he gets proofs about their involvement with the criminals, he added.

Police arrested Shamim and Iqbal around a week ago after tapping the mobile number of Shahadat who used to talk to them over mobile phone from India.

Following their information, the DB police arrested Alamgir, Rubel, Liton, Nazim Uddin alias Jamai, Monir Hossain Polash alias Killer Palash, Masudur Rahman Tota alias Tota, Mahmudur Rahman Shohel and Abdul Hannan.

In the last two years, the gang had killed several persons including business leader Aftab Ahmed, businessman Kazi Shahidullah, businessman Monu Mia, Ripon Chowdhury, Mahub and Shanto.

EU team has doubt

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treatment and there are no signs of immediate dialogue.

"I have my doubts about the elections, the main opposition Awami League may stick to its decision to boycott the elections," Ershad, chief of the second largest opposition party in parliament said. "Questions may also be raised about election results," he added.

During the one and a half hours meeting, the EU delegation discussed different issues related to the election.

The JP chairman said, "They [EU mission] wanted to know whether the elections will be held or not. At the same time asked whether the EU election observers should come to Bangladesh to monitor the election, if it is held at all."

"We would welcome the EU election monitors as we believe it will help the election process," the former dictator told reporters.

He said issues such as the main opposition's reservations about Justice KM Hasan as the chief adviser to the caretaker government and the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz were also discussed in the meeting.

Meanwhile, Jamaat leaders, during their meeting with the EU delegation yesterday, said the controversy over Justice KM Hasan is politically motivated.

The EU delegation also asked Jamaat leaders about the activities of the CEC. "We told them that the Election Commission is a constitutional body and a person with a position there is not important, but the institutions," Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mujahid told reporters after the meeting.

He said the Jamaat leaders were able to convince the EU mission that everything was on the right track for holding the next election in a free and fair manner. "We told the delegation that the voter list can be corrected if there were any flaws," he added.

Asked about Justice KM Hasan's recent visit of Comilla accompanied by BNP leaders, the Jamaat leader said such visits do not prove that he is loyal to a party.

The EU delegation told the journalists that they have been

meeting different political parties and bodies as part of their mission to collect information about the next election.

Andrew Bruce told the journalists that the meeting was very useful, constructive and appreciative.

Ameer of Jamaat Motiur Rahman Nizami and Joint Secretary General Qamaruzzaman were also present in the meeting.

The six-member EU team led by Andrew Bruce came to Dhaka on September 11 on a 10-day visit to assess Bangladesh's pre-poll environment.

BUSINESS COMMUNITY MEETING

The EU delegation in the evening met the business community at Hotel Radisson where they stressed the need for acceptable elections with the participation of all political parties.

Business leaders in the meeting stressed the need for reforms in the caretaker government system and the EC, a leader of the business community told The Daily Star over telephone.

A business leader told the EU mission, "We took an initiative to bring the opposition parties and the government to the negotiation table, but we failed."

"Little time is left. If the dispute between the government and the opposition over the electoral reforms issue is not solved before the caretaker government assumes power, there might be serious problems," business leaders told the EU mission.

The EU mission in the meeting also echoed the same opinion, saying, all disputes over reforms issue should be solved for the development of this country.

Business community bodies like the FBCCI (Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry), BGMEA (Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association), BKMEA (Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association), BTMA (Bangladesh Textile Mills Association), DCCI (Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry) were present in the meeting.

4 cops hurt in bomb blast

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Four policemen were injured in a bomb attack in Rallygate area under Daulatpur Police Station in the city last night.

The injured cops are Shah Alam, Wazed Ali, Shafi Ahmed and Shaher Ali. They are undergoing treatment at Police Hospital.

According to the officer-in-charge (OC) of Daulatpur Police Station, unidentified miscreants hurled a powerful bomb at the policemen while they were patrolling the area at 7:40 pm. There was no electricity in the area at that time, the OC said.

Police and Rab members cordoned off the area. Police arrested a man, but did not disclose his name.

All police stations and police outposts have been put on high alert following the bomb attack. Police patrol teams have also been asked to remain on high alert while on duty.

2.25kg gold

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Sensing the customers were law enforcers, Nasir fled along with two of his accomplices -- Tota and Zafar, Rab sources said. Rab, however, managed to capture Sekandar in this connection.

Oli threatens

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Oli was addressing a freshers' reception ceremony at Col Oli Ahmed Bir Bikram College under Bazalia union of Satkania upazila in the district as the chief guest in the morning.

He said that the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) should rather hunt for those who are eating away public money across the country, instead of running after the militants and criminals.

The Rab should make a list of these corrupt elements and bring them under 'cross-fire' before the next government comes to power, otherwise the future of the country would plunge into darkness, the resentful BNP leaders said.

In his speech, Oli also alleged that Prime Minister Khaleda Zia had earlier formed alliance with the corrupt and Rajakars (collaborators), and at present she is joining hands with an autocrat.

When he asked whether the people of Satkania would be beside him if he forms a new party, the crowd present at the function voiced their support.

Principal Abdur Rahman of the college presided over the function.

Power crisis

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city areas under Desa and Desco now stands at 1,800 MW while that is in the areas under PDB is also the same.

The demand under the Rural Electrification Board (REB) that covers six million connections or three crore people ranges between 1,800MW to 2,000MW. The REB receives only 500 to 600MW of electricity.

The country presently has about 85 lakh power connections. The number was around 50 lakh five years ago. In 2002, the plants generated a total of 3,100 MW of electricity matching the then demand for power. Presently, the country generates 3,300 MW when the number of consumers has nearly doubled.

UNB adds: The power generation went down to 3,000 MW against the countrywide demand of about 5,000 MW, accounting for a shortfall of 2,000 MW.

The capital alone has been having 700 to 800 MW of power shortage everyday over the last one week while elsewhere in the country, the situation is even grimmer. Many places rarely get electricity supply for hours together.

The people outside Dhaka have to pass days without electricity and the continuing sultry weather only adds to their sufferings.

In many areas, people fed up with recurring power failures took to the streets and fought pitched battles with the law enforcers.

Like the previous day, the residents of Moghbazar, Malibagh, Mouchak, Khilgaon, Tejgaon, Mohakhali, Mohammadpur, Mirpur, Gulshan and parts of the old city were worst affected.

PDB and REB officials said the residents of other divisional cities and rural areas also suffered due to the short supply of electricity.

12 Bogra villages

FROM PAGE 16
goods at the shawl market in Adamdighi upazila. But that too remains open only in the winter months, making marketing of the woven products difficult for the residents of other divisional cities and rural areas also suffered due to the short supply of electricity.

The local handloom weavers fear that the situation could get worse if some fixed marketing facilities are not set up immediately.

In addition, they need long term bank loans with minimum interests if they are to be cushioned from the adverse effects of the pricey markets.

Opposition goes all out

FROM PAGE 1
former prime minister, threw an apparent challenge to the ruling alliance amid repeated slogans and claps from the tens of thousands of opposition coalition activists and supporters. The tenure of the ruling alliance will be expired on October 27.

The leader of the opposition also announced a countrywide blockade of roads, railways and river communications scheduled for September 20 and a dawn to dusk countrywide hartal scheduled for September 21 in a bid to gear up the ongoing movement to realise the demands for reforms in the system of caretaker government, the Election Commission and electoral laws.

"Get ready to realise our demands," Hasina urged her coalition activists adding, "The ongoing movement have to go forward with enforcement of blockades to all types of communications including railways and highways."

The election cannot be held under Justice KM Hasan-led caretaker government and Justice Aziz-led Election Commission, she reiterated questioning the neutrality of former chief justice KM Hasan and Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz.

Speaking about the mass arrest ahead of the opposition grand rally, the AL chief demanded release of the arrestees within 24 hours. "Otherwise the people will free them going to every police station," Hasina said.

In her 47 minutes speech, the leader of the opposition heavily came down on the government accusing it of completely failing to run the state, and of failures to curb skyrocketing prices of essentials, unbridled corruption, the rise of militancy, and acute shortage of power.

She promised that if the opposition coalition is voted to power it will keep prices of essentials under control, curb militancy, and increase power generation.

Hasina said the BNP-led alliance has completed all arrangements to rig the polls sensing a defeat in the next election. "For this the government does not want to bring reforms. But people will not allow it to play with their constitutional right to franchise," she asserted, referring to the February 15, 1996 election, which had been boycotted by all opposition parties and the erstwhile BNP government was forced to step down the next month.

"We want a neutral and non-partisan caretaker government in accordance with the constitution. But KM Hasan and Aziz are BNP partisans. The chief adviser to the caretaker government should be appointed on the basis of a consensus and the Election Commission must be reconstituted to ensure free and fair election," Hasina said.

Narrating the government's indifference to the issue of electoral reforms and the opposition movement for more than a year, the leader of the opposition said the government has been dilly dallying with the proposals for electoral reforms and tricking the people with proposals for dialogue.

"If our demands are not met, you [the people] be ready and come to

Drug peddler

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On their confessional statements, the members of the elite force raided Hotel Classic at around 1:15am to arrest Nahid.

The Rab men knocked at the door of room no 305, but Nahid did not respond. Minutes later he opened the door and fired on the law enforcers, prompting them to retaliate.

Nahid received bullets in the head and died instantly.

The Rab members also arrested three accomplices of the drug peddler at the hotel. They are Jandar Ali, Ershad and Pradip of Bagha upazila in Rajshahi.

A local pistol and two bullets were recovered from the hotel room where Nahid was staying.

Nahid was accused in 10 cases including one for murder, the press release said.

23 rescued

FROM PAGE 16
troops, the traffickers managed to flee.

The victims hail from Noakhali, Chittagong and Sylhet districts. They told the BDR men that the traffickers promised them jobs in India and took Tk 600 from each of them.

They were later handed over to the police.

11 die

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In Baidoa, officials and witnesses said two powerful blasts rocked the town while Yusuf was driving away from the parliament building -- a converted warehouse -- in a convoy, shortly after he delivered a speech.

The first came from an apparently remote-controlled detonated car bomb and sent a huge ball of flame into the sky, destroying numerous vehicles parked in front of parliament, they said.

"There were screams everywhere," witness Sahad Mohamed Abukar told AFP.

A second blast occurred about 15 minutes later, witnesses said and a senior police official told AFP he had seen the bodies of at least four dead people lying in pools of blood at the scene.

Suleiman Olad Roble, a member of parliament, said no one inside the building had been injured and that after the blasts the lawmakers had gone ahead and approved Yusuf's nominations for a new cabinet.

Dhaka from villages, upazilas and districts with oafs, rowing poles and with whatever you have when I will call you," Hasina instructed her coalition activists in an apparent bid to build a resistance against the next caretaker government which will most possible be led by Justice KM Hasan, and against the EC led by Justice MA Aziz.

"If I now ask the people to go to the residence of the prime minister to ask whether she will accept the demands for reforms, you (the prime minister) will not find a way to escape," Hasina warned Khaleda.

"Come and see whether the people with us are for the reforms," she urged the prime minister adding, "It is not possible to hold down the people's strength."

The leader of the opposition demanded transparent ballot boxes in polling stations, a voter list with photographs of the voters, cancellation of appointments of district, upazila and thana election officers who were appointed on political considerations, and restoration of the previous provisions in the election laws regarding duties of the law enforcers during an election by repealing the provisions introduced during the last caretaker government.

Bhuiyan

FROM PAGE 16
BNP Senior Joint Secretary Genral Tarique