

AL men divided

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needed to be looked at. They also recommended curtailing the party president's absolute power in decision-making and bringing dynamism in the central committee.

They said for intra-party democracy to take root the party would have to rethink if its chief should continue in her position forever.

Asked about the much-talked about notion of having the two major political parties minus their current chiefs, Jaiil said only the leaders and councillors of the party have the right to decide how it would be run.

"It would be illegal and unconstitutional if the state acts to omit the two [from the respective parties] through formulating new laws," he said.

Jaiil, who was scheduled to leave for Singapore last night for medical check-up, stressed that the AL would be reformed under the leadership of Hasina.

A senior AL leader siding with anti-Hasina faction told The Daily Star that bringing reforms must not be tagged with her [Hasina's] presence.

Speaking in return for anonymity, some of the leaders said they are waiting for favourable conditions to come. "We will take the initiative to bring some radical changes even without her just when we would deem the time is ripe," one of them observed.

AL president's Political Secretary Sabar Hossain Chowdhury told The Daily Star that as some discussions are going on about registration of the political parties, they will have to wait to find out exactly what legal obligations they will have to fulfil as a party.

And this in turn will determine the extent and nature of the reforms, he added.

The reforms should always be viewed with an open mind and they should be continuing and sustaining for the very interest of the party, observed Sabar, also an organising secretary.

He said they will support measures to ensure transparency in all matters including party finances.

"We should now seriously consider introducing state funding for the political parties as is the case in many democracies," he noted.

AL Publicity Secretary Asaduzzaman Noor told The Daily Star that political parties are the life force of democracies. The broader the membership base, the more will be the practice of democracy within the party. "At the end of the day it is the members of the party who will determine how it is to be run," he pointed out.

One of the leaders criticised the party for not following its constitution properly, holding in time the councils and meeting of the National Executive Committee, the largest decision-making body.

Another leader loyal to Hasina said businessmen, former civil or military bureaucrats, or whoever he/she might be should not be given any post or nomination before three to five years serving for the party.

Some leaders said the party councillors should be allowed to express their opinions freely and without fear so they could choose a better leadership.

Law, Justice and Information Adviser Barister Mainul Hosen on April 22 said the present government is tolerant towards the politicians who are working to bring reforms in party politics. He said one should not become prime minister or party chief

‘UK, Bangladesh to work together for common values

UNB, Dhaka

British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury has said it is vital for the people of UK and Bangladesh to articulate common values of peace, tolerance, social justice, human rights and democracy.

"We will continue to work together to counter the threat of those who seek to profit from division, suspicion and violence and to address the root causes of extremism...", he said at a reception at the High Commission on Thursday evening marking the birthday of Queen Elizabeth II.

Bangladesh and Britain enjoy special bilateral relations, the envoy said, adding that the British Council is doing a great job in promoting people-to-people links and cultural exchange.

He said UK welcomes genuine applicants because they have much to offer, just as they have much to gain from Britain as a place of business, study, tourism and family life.

Choudhury said UK remains one of the largest investors in Bangladesh and a key market for Bangladeshi exports. UK companies are taking a lead in making corporate social responsibility work in Bangladesh.

On aid programme, he said Britain intends to scale up its contribution substantially from current bilateral aid programme of 125 million pound (\$ 250million) a year.

The High Commissioner said the UK is committed to working in partnership with Bangladesh to achieve its millennium development goals and to lift millions out of poverty for good.

Tragic death

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Proshika office under Gauranadi upazila on Barisal-Dhaka highway.

Barek Mridha's sons Bashar Mridha, 26, and Russel Mridha, 22, died on the spot.

Barek's son-in-law Akbar Ali, 31, and their family friends Mizanur Rahman, 24, and Ismail, 29, were admitted to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital in a critical condition.

8 hurt as live electric wire falls on them

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eight people suffered injuries when a live electric wire from an electric pole fell on them in the city's Jurain area yesterday.

The injured are Desa electricians Amir Hossain, 42, and Abdul Matin, 40, and locals Sanjida, 10, Alamgir, 10, Abdus Samad, 40, Sentu, 23, Shihab, 8, and AlAmin, 8.

They were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

The injured told reporters at the DMCH that local people saw an electric wire, torn during Thursday's storm, near Alam Super Market at around 12:20 pm and informed the Desa officials.

On information, Desa electricians and linesmen rushed to the scene and started repairing the wire. Suddenly, another electric wire tore from the pole and fell on the people gathered there, leaving the eight injured. Police said the wire tore as power supply resumed suddenly.

Of the injured, condition of Amir Hossain was stated to be critical.

Bhuiyan

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on her movement. Bhuiyan however did not agree to disclose any detail of the meeting to journalists.

He just told the reporters at his Gulshan residence, "It was a courtesy call during which she [Khaleda Zia] wanted to know about BNP leaders, activists and lawmakers across the country. I informed her as much as I know."

He also said Khaleda expressed her gratitude to her party leaders and activists, and to the people for praying for her wellbeing.

But when the reporters asked whether they discussed Hannan Shah's speeches, Mannan Bhuiyan kept mum and returned to his apartment.

Earlier, Mannan Bhuiyan was present with Khaleda Zia at the grave of late president Ziaur Rahman on April 1. But in the last three weeks there was no communication between the two, as according to BNP leaders, Khaleda Zia was virtually under house arrest during the period.

Last week Brig Gen (ret'd) Hannan Shah repeatedly claimed that Khaleda Zia had told him that she will bring changes to the ranks of the party leadership including to the post of the secretary general. But other leaders of the party told reporters that Khaleda Zia will convey her message through a proper person designated by herself.

Mannan Bhuiyan did not tell the reporters yesterday whether he discussed Hannan with the party chairperson, although the reporters threw a volley of questions towards him regarding the matter.

Correction

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Commission (EC) was inadvertently misquoted.

The report said Debapriya opposed the proposal that says a civil or military bureaucrat or a statutory body official cannot participate in the polls before three years from their retirement.

In fact, he said NGO officials, teachers and other professionals should get the opportunity to participate in the polls after resigning from their respective positions otherwise it would be difficult to find honest people in the next election.

High government officials can influence their own electoral prospects while in service, but the NGO employees have little opportunity to do so, he said.

Debapriya, however, welcomed the other provision restraining civil or military officials from participating in the election for three years from their retirement.

Australia-Sri Lanka

FROM PAGE 1
Ponting, it will pave the way for spin bowler Muttiah Muralidaran to weave his magic against the middle order.

Muralidaran believes Sri Lanka can only prosper by playing their own game, and not worrying in advance about what Australia might do.

Sri Lanka are likely to make one change with Farveez Maharoof returning in place of Dilhara Fernando, who struggled in the semifinal against New Zealand after being warned for running down the pitch in his follow-through.

Australia, by contrast, are certain to be unchanged, barring any last-minute injury problems and skipper Ricky Ponting has backed his side to lift their standards even higher.

It is a fair bet that whatever the outcome, there will be a wicket or two for seam bowler McGrath to add to his current career total of 380.

Australia have won five of the previous World Cup meetings between the two sides but the lone defeat, perhaps significantly, came in the final 11 years ago.

Based on Australia's form this time around, another Sri Lanka win would be an even greater achievement.



PHOTO: STAR

Ten-year-old Al-Amin, one of the ten people injured through contact with electric wires at Alambagh of Jurain in the capital, being soothed by his mother at Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday.

No BNP reforms

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Mannan Bhuiyan told The Daily Star recently that there is no alternative to reforms. "And those will be carried out with Khaleda Zia very much at the helm," he observed.

"The chairperson had already started some reforms but those are now suspended due to the government's ban on politics," he said, adding that they will go about the job after withdrawal of the ban.

Asked if the party will participate in the Election Commission's dialogue on electoral reforms, Brigadier (retired) Hannan Shah, adviser to the BNP chairperson, told The Daily Star, "The party cannot do anything without the consent of its head."

Major General (retired) ZA Khan, another adviser to Khaleda Zia, told The Daily Star, "The chairperson has already announced that the party would discipline those who would be found guilty of corruption and other crimes."

He said, "We won't accept any reforms or change without approval of Khaleda Zia."

Welcoming the government's press note on Khaleda, he said it will help the party go about introducing necessary reforms.

Meanwhile, differences of opinions among the leaders about the party leadership are growing with many of them preferring immediate changes to refurbish the image of the BNP and its leaders.

Others think the rank and file will never accept any changes if they are done without approval or involvement of Khaleda Zia.

Most of the leaders however reckon that it would be quite difficult for her to take any action against some of the leaders including her elder son and senior joint secretary general Tarique Rahman who stand accused of graft and different other crimes.

Dismissing the differences as rumours, Mannan Bhuiyan said, "There is no discontent or debate over the leadership as the party remains united under Khaleda Zia."

Many leaders believe that the party should hold a council as soon as possible to reorganise itself and only Khaleda can ensure intra-party democracy if she wants.

They said changes especially in the standing committee and executive committee are the most imperative for the party to perk up.

As per the BNP constitution, the chairperson holds absolute power over party affairs. S/he is empowered to take any decision at any time and it all speaks of a dictatorial system. Most leaders want that power to be curtailed but that is not possible without holding a council.

Tk 270cr laundered

FROM PAGE 1
he did not deposit any money. Gorki was earlier arrested and subsequently released upon his promise to cooperate in refunding the money gained through ill means.

A larger chunk of the retrieved Tk 270 crore consists of illegal money involving one single deal—the sale of 17 large tea gardens and other assets of the UK-based company to a group of eight leading local entrepreneurs for Tk 380 crore.

It is alleged that the actual price was never disclosed and the payment was made through an unofficial channel illegally.

Sources said following clues from top graft suspects, the joint forces interrogated many businessmen accused of being involved with high profile financial crimes.

Based on the primary findings, the joint forces believe the government can retrieve another Tk 3,000 crore, which was illegally transferred abroad, with a portion remaining inside the country.

Many of the corruption suspects have promised the government that they would pay it in US dollars through cheques to be deposited in the central bank.

The BB received Tk 230 crore as pay orders from the seven businessmen last week. It received another Tk 40 crore as pay orders yesterday, central bank sources said.

A source, however, said, "This recovery is almost nothing. But this proves the level of corruption in

Bangladesh during the alliance government's rule."

When the joint forces launched the anti-corruption drive in February, the USA and the UK offered the government expertise help in investigating international financial crime, he added. But, for some unknown reasons, the government has not yet taken that help and meanwhile the anti-corruption drive has dramatically slowed down, he said.

"The recovery has been made despite the government's weaknesses in investigating financial crimes. Imagine what we could achieve if we had the expertise," the official said.

Maj Gen Masud Uddin Chowdhury, chief of the National Coordination Committee on combating corruption and crime, told the press after a meeting at the Anti-Corruption Commission on April 18, "The taskforce members from the army, navy and the air force do not have that kind of experience in investigations. This has specially affected the pace of the progress of investigations."

He added that a move was being made to develop the expertise of the investigators.

The sale deal of foreign tea company, which has been producing tea since the time of British rule in the subcontinent, was secretly made in January last year.

Manpower export

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of workers to it for entry into computer network. But the Malaysian IT company that installed the computer network between Baira and Malaysia wants it.

He went on, "Baira says there will be mistakes if agents scan those and submit it. It (Baira) wants to do this just for creating a technical hazard so that it can extort workers."

According to sources in Baira, some of its employees were sacked for irregularities like manipulating serial numbers of workers taking bribe and taking fingerprints of many workers who did not have any demand letters from Malaysian employers.

Workers can give their fingerprints only when they have legitimate demand letters from employers.

"Several members of the now dissolved Baira executive committee were actively involved in such illegal practices to extort workers," a manpower agent alleged.

When contacted, Additional Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka Muhammad Maqsudur Rahman, who

has been appointed administrator of Baira, said the government has already asked the Malaysian High Commission in Dhaka to increase the number of Dhaka-Kuala Lumpur flights to carry the workers smoothly.

On the agents' submission of scanned photographs, passports and medical certificates, he said they have already discussed the issue and hopefully will allow the agents to do so. "This will reduce the work load of Baira to some extent," he said.

Asked if Baira will allow change of more than five percent of workers, the administrator said allowing this might create a situation in which workers will be harassed or exploited.

"A recruiting agency brings a worker to Baira office only when he becomes eligible for flying to Malaysia and pays to the agency. So, why should we allow the agencies to go for more changes of workers?"

He however said Baira will surely allow change of workers if there are logical grounds for it.

Chechen rebels down helicopter: 18 killed

AFP, Moscow

Up to 18 servicemen died yesterday when a Russian military helicopter was shot down in renewed violence in Chechnya, Russian news agencies quoted military officials as saying.

The Mi-8 helicopter was shot down over the Caucasus mountains near the southern town of Shatoi during a battle with Chechen rebels, Interfax and RIA Novosti news agencies said in their reports, quoting unnamed officials at the military's regional headquarters in the North Caucasus.

"There was a special operation early in the morning in which federal forces clashed with a group of bandits. Reinforcements were called for and three defence ministry helicopters arrived at the scene. One helicopter, according to preliminary data, was shot down while landing," RIA Novosti quoted the headquarters source as saying.

Top al-Qaeda operative taken into US custody

AFP, Washington

A top al-Qaeda commander who led operations in Afghanistan and plotted the assassination of Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf has been taken into US custody, a Pentagon spokesman said Friday.

Abd al Hadi al-Iraqi, who was taken to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba within the past week, was intercepted as he was trying to reach Iraq to manage al-Qaeda operations and possibly plot attacks against western targets outside Iraq, Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman said.

Whitman said al-Iraqi "was one of al-Qaeda's highest ranking and senior operatives at the time of his detention."

He was a key al-Qaeda commander in the late 1990s and from 2002 to 2004 was in charge of cross border attacks against coalition forces, working directly with the Taliban, he said.

"He also in recent years was involved in plots to assassinate perceived opponents of al-Qaeda to include Pakistan President Musharraf as well as other officials," he said.

Al-Iraqi was held by the CIA before being turned over to US military authorities, said Whitman.

The Pentagon spokesman declined to comment on when and where al-Iraqi was captured or whether US forces were directly involved in the capture.

"At the time of his capture he was trying to return to his native country, Iraq, to manage al-Qaeda's affairs and possibly focus on operations outside Iraq against western targets," he said.

"He was intercepted before he got there," he said.

Whitman said al-Iraqi also met with al-Qaeda members in Iran, but would not say when.

Two murdered

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autopsy of Rupa's body done.

Police said following a phone call from an unknown person they went to Babu's house at Islami Nagar and recovered the body around 10:00pm Thursday night breaking open the door of her bedroom. They found the body on the bed.

Police arrested Rupa's father-in-law Ezaj Miah after a murder case was filed in this connection. Babu has been absconding since the incident.

In another incident, assailants stabbed Delwar to death at Bobarghat in Kamrangirchar around 10:00pm Thursday night.

Police said Delwar came under attack in front of his house as he was returning home from Moulibazar. The assailants stabbed him indiscriminately killing him on the spot.

Police recovered the body and sent it to Mifford Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Democrats blast

FROM PAGE 16
of South Carolina and all of America," GOP chairman Robert Duncan said in a statement issued moments after the debate ended.

While Iraq dominated the debate's early moments, Edwards was asked about having paid for a \$400 haircut from campaign donations rather than from his own wallet.

"That was a mistake, which we remedied," he said. A wealthy former trial lawyer, he recalled once having gone to dinner at a restaurant as a young child and having to leave because his father could not afford the prices.

"I've not forgotten where I came from," he said.

Five of the eight Gravel, Biden, Dodd, Kucinich and Richardson raised their hands when moderator Brian Williams of NBC News asked whether they had ever had a gun in their home.

Asked about a recent Supreme Court ruling that upheld a ban on so-called partial birth abortions, several of the contenders replied they would not impose a litmus test on their own nominees to the high court.

At the same time, they stressed their support for abortion rights, and said their appointees to the bench would reflect that. "Any of my appointments to the high court would necessarily reflect my thinking," said Kucinich, who did not mention that he opposed abortion rights until switching positions before he ran for the White House in 2004.

There were moments of levity, as when Williams referred to Biden's reputation for "verbosity" and asked whether he had the discipline to be a player on the world stage.

"Yes," the Delaware lawmaker replied with uncharacteristic brevity.

Perhaps because the campaign is still in its early stages, there was little cross-stage criticism.

Kucinich challenged Obama at one point for once having said all options were on the table with respect to Iran. "You're setting the stage for another war," the Ohio lawmaker said.

"I think it would be a profound mistake for us to initiate a war with Iran," Obama replied. "But have no doubt, Iran possessing nuclear weapons will be a major threat to us and to the region."

The debate was about 40 minutes old when Clinton made the first mention of her husband, the former president. Responding to a question about the recent shooting spree at Virginia Tech, she began by saying, "I remember very well when I accompanied Bill to Columbine" the Colorado high school that was the scene of another shooting spree a decade ago.

On another issue, several of the contenders talked of the need to expand health care coverage, and Obama sketched a few details of a plan that critics have said is light on specifics.

He said he would allow the uninsured to buy into a plan like federal employees have, improve technology to cut costs, and provide government-funded catastrophic insurance.

Not surprisingly, Bush's Iraq war policy found no supporters on the debate stage.

"I am proud that I opposed this war from the start," said Obama a jab at those on the stage who voted to authorise the invasion.

"The president has a fundamentally flawed policy," said Biden. "The president should start off by vetting the legislation he says he will veto."

Dodd said Bush was pursuing a "failed policy."

Kucinich jabbed at the senators on stage, saying it made no sense to oppose the war and then turn around and vote for more money as they did. The Ohio lawmaker voted against the legislation that cleared Congress earlier in the day.

Tiger attack

FROM PAGE 16
carried out a second air raid on the Palaly military complex in the island's north on Tuesday.

A total of nine security personnel were killed and 30 wounded in the two air attacks by the Tigers, who are believed to have a small fleet of Czech-made Zlin Z-143 single-engined light aircraft.

The planes are believed to have been smuggled in pieces into the north of the island by boat, and can be flown from tiny makeshift air strips in the jungle. The defence ministry has said that the Tigers possessed at least five light planes.

The LTTE attacks have also caused havoc for international passenger flights.

Overnight, two incoming Sri Lankan Airlines flights were diverted to the nearby south Indian state of Tamil Nadu, before continuing their journey later Friday morning, airport officials said.

A Singapore Airlines aircraft, which was at the airport at the time the runway was shut down, was also delayed.

The attack alert came the day after Hong Kong carrier Cathay Pacific resumed flights to Colombo, which had been suspended after last month's attack.

Immediately after last month's attack, Emirates airline of Dubai also stopped night flights to Colombo.

To make matters worse for Sri Lankan authorities, a helicopter gunship scrambled to detect the suspect plane ran into technical difficulties and crash-landed just outside Anuradhapura air base in the government-held north, military sources said. No one was seriously injured.

Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan navy and the Tiger rebels exchanged fire Friday in the northeast of the island, leaving at least three sailors dead, military sources said.

The sailors were on a routine patrol at Kutchchaveli in Trincomalee district when they were ambushed by Tigers," a military source said. There was no immediate word from the rebels about the incident.

Hawking's zero gravity

FROM PAGE 16
flight will be a prelude to a 2009 voyage into space.

"I have long wanted to go into space," said Hawking, who is almost entirely paralysed. "A zero gravity flight is the first step to space travel," he said at a news conference near the runway. "I hope many people will follow in my path."

Four doctors and two nurses were with Hawking on the flight aboard G-Force One, also known as the vomit comet.

Zero Gravity Corporation, a private company, usually charges 3,500 dollars for the flight, but the famed Cambridge professor got a free ride, with another eight seats auctioned off for charity.

Specially trained pilots took the plane up to 10,000 meters (33,000 feet) before plunging to 2,500 meters (8,000 feet) to give the passengers about 30 seconds of gravity-free flying.

The aircraft repeated the manoeuvre eight times, giving Hawking a total of four minutes of diminished gravity.

"Professor Hawking reached for the sky and he touched the heaven today," said Peter Diamandis who heads the flight company.

Hawking was seated as the plane went up. Once the aircraft tipped over to zero gravity, two people lifted him and guided him up into mid-air, where he floated freely.

"I have been in a wheelchair for almost four decades, the chance to float free in zero gravity will be wonderful," he said before boarding the flight at the runway usually used for space shuttle landings.

On Wednesday, the plane's crew and Hawking's assistants ran a test flight, using a 14-year-old boy to stand in for the British professor.

The flights aboard Zero-G One are similar to those the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) has conducted for 40 years to train astronauts.

Zero G says the weightlessness experienced inside the plane is similar to a free fall in sky diving.

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