

EU reiterates support

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British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury said they support the caretaker government as long as they are "working towards holding free and fair elections and leaving behind an infrastructure and a set of reforms to ensure a sustainable democracy and high standard of elections in the future".

Mayke noted that though it is expected that political parties themselves should move towards democratising their party structures, political reform involves all democratic stakeholders as well.

French Ambassador Jacques Andre-Costilhes, Danish Ambassador Einar Jense, Netherlands Ambassador Kees Boersma, Italian Ambassador Pietro Ballerini and Swedish Ambassador Britt Faikman Hagstrom attended the press conference, alongside six other honorary consul-generals and consuls.

Regarding the human rights situation, Choudhury said, "When we look at the overall data, we can see a slight improvement." He added that it is evident in decreasing crossfire deaths.

He, however, said that "it (human rights situation) is still not a satisfactory situation" and that they are still closely monitoring individual incidents. He added that the EU is referring individual human rights cases to the caretaker government and they have been resolving the matter.

Asked to comment on the reported restrictions on BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's movement and the overturned ban on Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina's return, he said, "Though we have to bear in mind that there is a state of emergency it is unfortunate to have restrictions on movement and expression."

"We would not like to comment on an internal security matter of Bangladesh," he added.

The British high commissioner said that the government would have to make the day-to-day judgement on keeping a balance between maintaining security and safeguarding the individual rights to freedom of expression.

Replying to a query whether they still have confidence in the government's judgement after its 'U-turn' on sending Hasina, Mayke

said they would rather not pass judgement on a host government's security policies, but added that an ability to shift positions shows they are flexible enough to learn from their mistakes and redress them immediately.

Asked to comment on the press freedom under the state of emergency, he said that phone calls by intelligence agencies to the media outlets would amount to sabotage against the government. "It is the wrong kind of press policy," he said.

Describing the chief adviser's meeting with the media leaders earlier this week as an 'encouraging confidence building measure', Mayke said that a lot of it would be undone by trying to inhibit press freedom.

Anwar Choudhury said he does not agree with some observers' position that the country is being run by the military, saying that there is a civilian government in place which is being assisted by the military and supported by the people.

Regarding the election timeframe, he said that the EC announcement to hold elections sets the end of 2008 as the perimeter which means elections could be held at any point between January 2008 and the year's end.

He also said that under the Fakhruddin-led government, conditions have improved for implementing development projects and a situation is in place for more efficient and effective investment and trade.

Freowin in his opening statement said that Brussels is mulling a revised and development-friendly Rules of Origin that govern the import of Bangladeshi goods to the EU, which stood at 5 billion euros in 2006.

He also touched on EU commitments to strike a fair deal for the least-developed countries such as Bangladesh at the WTO Doha Development.

Mayke in his introductory remarks as the envoy of Germany, which holds the current EU presidency, mentioned EU-Bangla cooperation in combating climate change, trade, in the UN and other multilateral organisations, and shared obligations to protect human rights and democracy.

CPA urged to restore Bangladesh's membership

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar yesterday sent a letter to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Secretariat in London requesting it to restore Bangladesh's membership in the association.

"Though there is no functioning parliament right now in Bangladesh, but we are still very much in the parliamentary system of government," the letter said, addressed to the CPA's secretary general.

"Speaker and Deputy Speaker are there and they will work as bridges until election of the next parliament," the letter added.

The CPA recently suspended Bangladesh's membership in the 56-member association saying that there is no elected government and parliament in Bangladesh. In a letter to the Jatiya Sangsad secretariat, the CPA had also asked Bangladesh to get back its annual membership fee.

Bangladesh will not be allowed to participate in any upcoming programme of the association, like conferences and seminars due to the latest decision.

Police raid 8 DU halls, arrest 12

DU CORRESPONDENT

Police raided eight dormitories of Dhaka University (DU) early hours yesterday and rounded up 12 people -- nine students and three outsiders.

Police searched a number of particular rooms at SM Hall, Muhsin Hall, Bangabandhu Hall, Fazlul Haq Hall, Jagannath Hall, Ziaur Rahman Hall, Jasimuddin Hall and Zahurul Haq Hall in search of "listed" activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL).

The arrestees are Rashedul Islam Ripon and Ziaul Haq from SM Hall, Kreepa Shindu and Sugam Kumar Das from Jagannath Hall, Habibur Rahman from Muhsin Hall, Shaheen Alam, Shahinuzzaman and Nasiruddin from Bangabandhu Hall, Mostafa Kamal, Anwar Hossain and Shahedur Rahman from Fazlul Haq Hall and Anwarul Hakim from Zia Hall.

No arrest was made from Jasimuddin Hall and Zahurul Haq Hall.

The three outsiders arrested are Habibur Rahman, Anwarul Hakim and Mostafa Kamal.

All but two arrestees were produced before a Dhaka court and sent to jail on charge of violation of the state of emergency laws. Two of the outsiders, Anwarul Hakim and Mostafa Kamal, were set free in the afternoon.

Police sources said the raids, third one this month, were conducted to capture the JCD and BCL activists who took part in separate processions violating the state of emergency.

Shahbagh police said 10 of the detainees were on their list and the other two were picked up by mistake.

Shahbagh police confirmed that the raids have been going to hunt down the JCD and BCL activists who are on the law enforcement agencies' list for violating the state of emergency.

A relative of arrested DU student Anwar Hossain was seen at Shahbagh Police Station inquiring about the reason behind Anwar's arrest. While talking to this correspondent, he claimed that Anwar was not involved in any political activities or with any political organisation.

Star dies

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The resulting stellar light show lasted 70 days.

A supernova usually occurs when a vast star collapses under its own gravity because it has ceased to produce nuclear energy in its core. But the astronomers think that this explosion may have been due to a drop in energy caused by particle changes brought about by radioactive gamma rays.

It takes a star at least eight times the size of the sun to burst into a supernova, but SN 2006 appears to have been much bigger, the report said -- around the size of 150 suns.

"Astronomers think many of the first generation of stars were this massive, and this new supernova may thus provide a rare glimpse of how the first stars died," the team's statements said.

"It is unprecedented, however, to find such a massive star and witness its death."

The stellar blast some 240 million light years away may also have consequences closer to home, the astronomers suggested.

The star that produced SN 2006 apparently expelled a large amount of material before exploding, with a mass suspiciously similar to that of another massive star, Eta Carinae, part of Earth's own Milky Way galaxy.

This raises the prospect that Eta Carinae "may be poised to explode as a supernova," the astronomy team said in its statement of the findings to be published in the *Astrophysical Journal*.

"We don't know for sure if Eta Carinae will explode soon, but we had better keep a close eye on it just in case," said Mario Livio of the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore, who did not take part in the research.

"Eta Carinae's explosion could be the best star-show in the history of modern civilization."

Playing with projects

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Referring to a project of the Election Commission (EC) titled 'strengthening the Election Commission for improving the election process', the IMED report said the project was for preparing a computerised voter database in 83 districts for holding transparent elections.

The three-year project had started in 1997 and was extended for another five years with a deadline for completion set for June 2005.

According to the IMED report, although the EC spent Tk 32 crore allocated for the project, it failed to fulfill its objectives.

The report said, "Only 30 to 35 percent of the work of voter database was completed by the EC." Most interestingly, the EC also failed to enter the voter list of 2005 into the database, it said.

The education ministry spent Tk 1,213 crore in additional costs for four of its 10 completed projects, during FY 2004-05.

"A number of teachers went abroad for higher studies under the modernising and restructuring project of Bangladesh College of Leather Technology, but they did not return yet," the report said adding that in another project the contractor collected its bills without providing furniture for the project as required.

The report went on saying that the stipend programme in the secondary school level did not bring any help for poor female students due to some rigid and complicated conditions, although Tk 1,661 crore allocated for the project had been spent.

According to the policies of the stipend programme, every female student of the secondary level is eligible for the grant if she has 75 percent attendance in school and gets 45 percent marks in annual exams.

But due to poor living conditions, most of the female students

failed to get 45 percent marks. As a result, the major portion of the stipend went to the students from wealthier families, sources said.

The poor students also failed to avail other grants including tuition and examination fees waivers and stipends for buying books.

Referring to the power ministry projects, the IMED report said project expenditures were increased from 24 to 228 percent. "In a project, the Rural Electrification Board (REB) divided up the project's procurement details in small parts to avoid notifying the higher authorities and the practice was only to create room for corruption," said the report.

According to the report the communication ministry completed a total of 18 projects during FY 2004-05 and 13 of those spent nine to 100 percent more than the original fund allocation, while the ministry extended the time for completion of 14 projects by 15 to 100 percent.

The situation was the same in the housing and public works ministry when four of its total eight projects needed 29 to 84 percent additional funding. The timeframes for project implementations were extended by 50 to 600 percent for at least five projects.

During the same fiscal year, the energy ministry completed 12 projects and the project costs of at least seven of them were increased by 10 to 61 percent, while the timeframes for completions of at least 11 projects were extended by 71 to 750 percent.

The IMED evaluation also found mismanagement in completing projects of the education ministry. The report said the education ministry finished 10 projects during the period and the implementation costs of at least four of those were increased by 23 to 300 percent, while the duration of nine projects were extended by 50 to 116 percent.

President asks EC

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Ahmed last month said the stalled ninth parliamentary election will be held before end of 2008.

On April 5, the CEC disclosed a set of proposals for electoral reforms at a press conference, saying no election will be held in the following 18 months -- the minimum time required for preparing a voter list with photographs.

On EC initiatives for electoral reforms, Huda said they want to complete the reforms by July or August at the latest.

The EC had planned to hold talks with the political parties to finalise the reform proposals. At a meeting with the law adviser on April 4, Huda asked the caretaker government to withdraw restrictions on indoor politics so that the EC can hold talks with the political parties.

Election commissioners Sahul Hossain and Brigadier General (ret'd) M Sakhawati Hossain also said on several occasions that they hoped the government will lift the ban soon.

Huda yesterday said the government will lift the embargo when it thinks fit. "Perhaps, the government thinks the situation still does not allow lifting the ban on indoor politics. It will be lifted when the government feels convenient," he said.

In reply to a question, the CEC said he had no discussion with the president about the restriction on

indoor politics.

"We have requested the government (to withdraw the restrictions). Now the government will decide about the withdrawal as it deems fit," he added.

Huda, however, said the EC is not facing any difficulties regarding the electoral reforms because of the embargo. "The election will be held by 2008. So, we have time for the reforms," he said.

Meanwhile, the EC sits tomorrow with constitution experts to examine if the EC Secretariat can be separated from the control of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) without amending the constitution.

The CEC at a meeting with eminent citizens on April 26 said the EC Secretariat cannot be separated from the PMO without amending the constitution, but experts said the amendment is not required for the task.

Harris Chowdhury

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Meanwhile, three other courts will hear today arguments on charge framing against three former state ministers and two family members in connection with three graft cases.

Hearing of a graft case against Giasuddin Al Mamun will also be held at Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court today.

Harris' cousin Fakrudin Chowdhury and Alifazuddin, caretaker of Harris' neighbour, did not appear before the court despite having received the court summons earlier, a prosecutor said.

Earlier on May 6, the same court recorded statements of Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) Deputy Director Abu Sayeed, ACC Field Officer Khandaker Akhteruzzaman, and Abdul Hakim, caretaker of another neighbour of Harris.

On April 30, Judge Momin Ullah of the Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court framed charges against Harris in his absence and summoned the complainant and witnesses for deposition on May 6.

The ACC deputy director filed the case against Harris on April 5 for not submitting his wealth statement to the commission within its stipulated time.

In response, the court issued an arrest warrant and ordered the authorities concerned to send its copy to the police station concerned.

On February 18, the ACC asked Harris to submit his wealth statement within 72 hours, but neither Harris nor any of his representatives complied with the instruction. The anti-graft body at a meeting on March 29 approved filing of the case.

Meanwhile, judges of the three special courts will hear arguments today on charge framing against former state minister for planning Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, former state minister for civil aviation Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin and his son Mir Helaluddin, former state minister for labour Amanullah Aman and his wife Sabera Aman.

The ACC pressed charges against the five on April 29.

Hannan Shah, others granted bail in arms case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday granted anticipatory bail for six months to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's adviser Brig (ret'd) Hannan Shah and his associates in an arms case.

A division bench of the HC comprising Justice MA Wahhab Mian and Justice M Emdadul Haque granted the bail as Hannan Shah and the others surrendered before it seeking bail.

The court also issued a rule upon the government to explain why they should not be granted regular bail.

On May 6, an Awami League (AL) leader of Kapashia upazila filed the case with Gazipur cognizance court against Hannan Shah and others accusing them of launching an armed attack on an AL procession on October 28 last year, the last day of BNP-Jammat alliance rule.

Talking to reporters at his residence yesterday evening, Hannan Shah said the present government should hold election as soon as possible and hand over the power to elected representatives. And it will be good both for the government as well as the people, he added.

About the BNP chief, he said restriction imposed around Khaleda Zia's Shaheed Maimun Road residence still continues.

"They imposed restriction to prevent her (Khaleda) from giving any instructions to the party leaders as well as the people," he said, adding he tried to meet her but he was not allowed.

Asked what they will do if the emergency is prolonged, he said, "Mainly, we will fight in legal ways."

Sylhet mayor

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getting justice from the court," Kamran said.

The now defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption filed the case in 2003.

Sylhet police arrested Kamran early April 6 after Sylhet District and Sessions Judge Abdul Gafur issued an arrest warrant against him a day before in this connection. Following the arrest, the mayor was sent to Sylhet Central Jail. He was transferred to Comilla Central Jail three days later.

On April 22, a divisional special judge rejected the interim bail prayers of the mayor and two other accused.

However, one of the accused, Abdul Wadud Khaled, a ward commissioner, died of a heart attack on April 30. He was allegedly absconding following the issuance of the arrest warrant.

Another accused Abdul Quaiyum Jalali Ponki, a ward commissioner, is also on bail since May 3.

However, the 16 other accused in the case are at large. On February 7, Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) filed the charge sheet against the 19 including 16 present and former ward commissioners of the SCC.

The ACC investigation officer of the case in the charge sheet said the accused people leased the kitchen market to the then ward commissioner Sajjadur Rahman's younger brother Azadur Rahman Azad, now a ward commissioner, on May 11, 2000 without any tender or approval from the ministry concerned.

They had misappropriated Tk 23 lakh through the corrupt practice, the charge sheet read.

Govt to repossess

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They owe Tk 210 crore to BTMC for loans taken from different banks for import purposes, which they inherited from the corporation at the time of purchase.

The then Awami League government in March 2001 handed over the ownership of the eight state owned ailing textiles mills to newly formed boards of directors comprising employees and workers of the mills to continue operations of those and to save the jobs.

Sources alleged that persons who have been managing the mills since the handover are mostly labour leaders, who do not have experience in managing such mills.

At the time of the handover of the mills it was agreed that the workers and employees who own the mills should re-employ former workers, but a section of the labour leaders who became directors did not let that happen.

The current directors however have been reaping personal benefits by leasing and renting out different facilities of the mills, the sources said.

The eight mills are --- Dhaka Cotton Mills in the capital, Munnu Textile Mills in Tongi, Fine Cotton Mills in Tongi, New Olympia Textile Mills in Tongi, Meghna Textile Mills in Tongi, Laxmi Naryan Cotton Mills in Naryanganj, Pylon Industries Limited in Chittagong, and Karolin Silk Mills in Chittagong. The mills possess over 74.83 acres of land.

Matiur Rahman, managing director of New Olympia Textiles Mills Limited, however said the government also breached some sections of the agreement making it difficult for the current managements to comply with the full agreement.

"BTMC did not permit the mill operators to have balancing, modernization, rehabilitation, and expansion of the mills. It also did not pay the utility bills which it was supposed to pay," Rahman said.

He denied the allegation of money being siphoned from the mills through sales of machinery.

Wolfowitz fights

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former US deputy secretary of defense, of its findings, a move that is likely to add to the weeks of pressure on him to resign.

The committee continued to mull what punishment to recommend, the Times said late Monday.

But it reported that most board members want Wolfowitz, whose management style and determination to uproot some of the bank's bureaucratic practices has upset many staff, to step down.

"The seven-member committee did not make its report public, but a bank official with ties to the panel said that Wolfowitz was given only a day or two to respond," The Los Angeles Times said, adding, "The maneuver seemed designed to force him to step down quickly, thus avoiding further public action in the bruising controversy."

In Brussels, Dutch Finance Minister Wouter said Tuesday that a conflict of interest charge would boost pressure on the embattled World Bank president to resign.

Asked as he arrived for a meeting of EU finance ministers if pressure was mounting on Wolfowitz to resign, Bos told reporters "yes", but added that "it's the board (of the bank) that has to take a decision."

Last week Wolfowitz rejected criticism that he oversaw an improper pay and promotion deal for his partner.

In a letter released Thursday he said that he had acted within World Bank rules in requesting the pay hikes and promotions worth nearly 200,000 dollars for his companion Shaha Riza, who also worked at the international development lender.

Bank managers are not allowed to supervise employees with whom they have such a close relationship.

"It is grossly unfair and wrong to suggest that I intended to mislead anyone, and I urge the committee to reject the allegation that I lack credibility," Wolfowitz said in a letter to the investigatory panel.

The controversy has threatened to hobble the bank's lending and devel-

Hasina's house

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to the police headquarters. Uttara zone Patrol Inspector Kamruzzaman has been suspended.

Meanwhile, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil, presidium member Tofail Ahmed and wife of detained presidium member Kazi Zafarullah met Hasina yesterday evening amid tight security.

Police this time took three-tier security measures instead of the previous two-tier to tighten security for Hasina, also a former prime minister, on her return home.

Earlier the government withdrew Hasina's security on March 27, 12 days after she left for the USA.

Police took security control of the area yesterday morning. Three platoons of police led by three assistant commissioners have been deployed to ensure security around Sudha Sadan.

A total of 11 security checkpoints have been set up at different points on the way to Sudha Sadan. Three barricades were put within 200 yards of Hasina's residence.

Number of plain-clothes police has been increased alongside the uniformed staffs.

Talking to reporters, AL chief's personal assistant Hasan Mahmud said they have no information on whether restriction has been imposed on Hasina's movement adding the former premier is yet to chalk out any programme outside the Sudha Sadan.

Restrictions have been imposed on general people's movement on the front road of the Sudha Sadan.

Journalists were also not allowed to go near to Hasina's residence.

Police sources said they have been directed to keep under limit visitors' entrance into Sudha Sadan and its adjacent area.

Only members of the AL central working committee, advisory councils, top leaders of the front organisations, personal staffs and relatives will be allowed to visit Sudha Sadan, a police official said on condition of anonymity adding the government has directed them in this regard.

Police prevented Shafiq Ahmed Chowdhury, joint secretary of UK chapter of AL, Mezbah Uddin Siraz, general secretary of Sylhet district unit of AL, and three other leaders of the same districts, from entering Sudha Sadan.

However, some senior AL leaders including Abdur Razzak, Abdul Latif Siddique, Nuh Alam Lenin, Dipu Moni and Nazma Rahman met Hasina yesterday.

JMB men

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Station said JMB militants Rokonzaman, Khalequzzaman Lebu and Mahbul Haque revealed to the interrogators that they recruited a large number of people at a number of established NGOs in the northern districts.

They were working in NGOs at grassroots-levels and simultaneously regrouping JMB members.

The sources said they told interrogators that there are at least 100 active JMB militants in Rangpur of whom 25 are in Gangachara upazila.

During interrogation the JMB men said many JMB men took up jobs at different NGOs upon instructions from the high command. Their purpose was to attack those offices in future.

Meanwhile, the three JMB militants were sent to jail custody yesterday on completion of their five-day remand. Police lodged cases against them under Special Powers Act.

Detective Branch (DB) of police arrested them at a remote char of the Teesta. Rokonzaman is the chief of Soudpara Dakhil Madrasa and Khalequzzaman is a grassroots-level worker of ASOD, a local NGO. Mahbul is the owner of the house from which police arrested them.

opment programs, as well as an anti-corruption campaign targeting borrowers that was Wolfowitz's signature initiative.

"There's a real danger because of this Wolfowitz stuff that donors are going to find a reason not to give," Elizabeth Stuart, senior policy adviser for Oxfam International, told The Washington Post.

Some saw Kellem's stepping down as possibly an effort to blunt the attack and save his boss's job.

The director of strategy and a close adviser to Wolfowitz, Kellem's said he was leaving for "other opportunities."

A former journalist, Kellem's was tapped for the World Bank post after Wolfowitz, architect of the Iraq war, took the helm of the international financial institution in June 2005.

The men had worked together in the Defense Department when Wolfowitz was deputy secretary during President George W. Bush's first term.

Kellem's joined the Pentagon in August 2001 and left to become the spokesman for Vice President Dick Cheney at the White House.

One of Kellem's statements has been key to the international scandal. Questioned by reporters, he insisted the salary raises awarded to Riza on Wolfowitz's orders had been approved by the bank's board of directors.

But the directors denied they were informed of her promotion and they said they had not approved it. They then turned the matter over to the ethics panel to investigate whether Wolfowitz had violated bank rules.

Opponents of Wolfowitz have regularly pointed to Kellem's as symbolic of a cloistered leadership that is too centralized and authoritarian.

In this light, Kellem's departure could be interpreted as representing the former Pentagon hawk's willingness to acknowledge the criticism in the hope of assuring his own political survival.

Dastagir

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family members about his whereabouts and justice would take its course.