

**Polls by end of 2008- Reiterates CA**

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhrudin Ahmed said the general election will be held by the end of 2008 in accordance with the timetable set by the Election Commission. The CA stated this when visiting former US ambassador to Bangladesh William B Milam called on him at his office. During the meeting, they held candid discussion on the reform measures being undertaken by the present caretaker government for ensuring a level playing field prior to holding the next general election, according to an official. The CA told the former US ambassador that the government is doing everything in a transparent manner as per law of the land. He elaborated on institutional, legal and policy reforms undertaken in various sectors, especially in administrative, electoral and anti-corruption areas. Milam, senior policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars in Washington, lauded the reform measures taken by the caretaker government. The CA said the present government is directly accountable to the people and taking into account the views and opinions of the grassroots people as well as the media on a day-to-day basis. He said the armed forces are also assisting the government in specific areas like maintaining law and order and drive against corruption as per the country's legal provisions. Milam was accompanied by Chairman of the US-based America-Bangladesh Advisory Council Shabbir Ahmed Chowdhury. -Unb, Dhaka, May 29.

Forest boss held with tucked away Tk 1cr

Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF) Osman Gani was arrested at his Uttara house with Tk 1 crore in cash that he had hidden at some unusual places in his house. A joint team of Anti-Corruption Commission, army, Rab and police raided Osman's Bonobithi house at Sector 8 at around 11:00am and found the money, in several currencies, hidden inside a rice drum in the kitchen and inside a pillow kept in the balcony, among other places. The joint team also recovered two passports of the Forest Department head during the nine-hour raid. Syed Nazrul Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Uttara Police Station, told The Daily Star that the joint forces had the information that the CCF had a lot of money hidden at his house. They have been keeping an eye on him for the last couple of days, he added. The joint forces conducted a thorough search of the house and seized Tk 92.9 lakh, US\$1,300 and Indonesian rupees 3,000. When the law enforcers asked Osman about the money, he was silent for some time and then passed out. The OC also said that they have information that Osman has a locker in the Dhamondi branch of Standard Chartered Bank and they would take him there to check the locker. -The Daily Star, May 30.

HC sets hearing dates in Aug for 2 graft cases against Hasina

The High Court (HC) set August 1 and 7 for hearing on Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina's petitions for quashing two graft cases against her regarding the purchase of MiG-29 fighters and a frigate. The decision followed a sudden move by the military-backed interim government to revive the years-old cases against the former premier. Deputy Attorney General Golam Mohammad Chowdhury on Monday petitioned an HC bench for the hearing dates. Earlier in 2003, the HC stayed proceedings of the cases in response to her appeals. The now defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption filed a case for irregularities in the MiG-29 purchase against Hasina and four others with the Tejgaon Police Station on December 11, 2001. The following year it filed another graft case against her and five others with the same police station. The second case relates to frigate purchase. During her stint as the prime minister between 1996 and 2001, the government procured eight MiG-29 fighters from Russia for the air force and a frigate from South Korea for the navy. In the first information reports, the complainant alleged that the government had to incur a loss of Tk 447 crore in the buying of frigate and Tk 700 crore in eight MiG-29s. In 2003, charges were pressed against Hasina and others in the two cases and charge sheets were submitted before the court. The HC on May 16 set July 25 to hear the AL chief's petition for cancelling the proceedings in the four-and-a-half-year old Meghnaghata Power plant graft case against her. -The Daily Star, May 30.

Bashundhara deposits Tk 77cr 'ill-gotten money' to govt exchequer

Bashundhara Group, the country's one of the largest conglomerates, deposited Tk 77 crore to the government exchequer allegedly earned through illegal means. "This is illegally earned money and they (Bashundhara Group) were compelled to deposit to the exchequer," a source said. Earlier, seven businessmen deposited Tk 270 crore illegal money with the government through several pay orders in local currency for the first time in the country's history, banking sources said. In the face of the government's anti-corruption drive conducted by the joint forces, these businessmen had to deposit the amount, which the central bank termed "non-tax revenue." Army Chief General Moeen U Ahmed in a recent meeting with the editors of different media said the government's initiative to retrieve illegally earned money from corrupt people will continue. He said the process is underway to get back another Tk 824 crore. Earlier, the Anti-Corruption Commission asked Bashundhara Group Chairman Ahmed Akbar Sobhan to submit his wealth statement suspecting him as a corrupt businessman. But, Sobhan did not comply and went into hiding. -The Daily Star, May 30.

Ershad's graft case resumes

Trial of a graft case filed 16 years back against former president and Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad and five others began at a Dhaka court yesterday. Judge Malik Abdullah Al Amin of the Special Court for Dhaka Division recorded statement of the complainant Golam Mortuza, an official of now defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption, of the case and fixed June 18 for next hearing. The proceeding of the case was stayed for a long time due to a High Court order though charges were framed on July 7, 1992. Ershad and AKM Mosharaf Hossain, former chairman of Bangladesh Shilpa Bank, abusing power and through corruption, directed the authorities concerned to remit Tk 35 lakh loan taken by M/S Three Star Poultry Farm Limited on September 4, 1979. Later, a graft case was filed with Motijheel Police Station against Ershad, Mosharaf, Managing Director Jahangir Kabir, Directors Firoz Kabir and Borhan Uddin and Jahangir's wife Nurunnahar Shelly. Of them, Jahangir and his wife Shelly are still at large while others are now on bail. The investigation officer pressed charges against Ershad and five others on November 6, 1991. -The Daily Star, May 31, 2007

CHT land body to be activated

The government is going to activate the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Land Commissions to resolve land related disputes between indigenous communities and Bangla speaking settlers of the region. The CHT Land Commission was made to resolve land related disputes between the two communities but the commission remained inactive since its formation more than three years ago. The decision was made yesterday at a meeting of CHT Advisory Council held after more than six years. Since the formation of the council, only two meetings were held during the last Awami League government. No meeting of the council were held during the four-party alliance government. Foreign and CHT Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury chaired the meeting held at the auditorium of CHT affairs ministry. Chairman of CHT Regional Council Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma, circle chiefs of Chakma, Bomang and Mong, and chairman and members of Khagrachari, Bandarban and Rangamati district council were present at the meeting. -The Daily Star, June 01, 2007.

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RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF CULTURAL EXPRESSION**A platform for protecting and promoting cultural diversity**

FARAH ASHRAF

FOR the first time in history, cultural diversity is established as an immutable human right. The UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, adopted in Paris on 20 October 2005, entered into force on March 18 this year, guaranteeing that all forms of cultural expression remain outside the norms and negotiations of organisations regulating trade, with a view to protecting and promoting cultural diversity.

The call for international instruments focusing cultural diversity was experienced at the end of the 20th century with the accelerating process of globalisation. The most broadly accepted definition of culture is indeed that adopted at the Mexico City MONDIACULT World Conference in 1982 which reaffirmed that, in its broadest sense, culture can now be regarded as "the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of society or a social group. In addition to art and literature, it encompasses lifestyles, basic human rights, value systems, traditions, and beliefs."

In the 1970's and 1980's the emphasis of UNESCO's work on cultural relations was on "culture and development" and on "the protection of cultural heritage". The purpose was to ensure the promotion of cultural identity within the framework of a global development policy, which was then encouraged by the international community. During this period culture was defined and considered in UNESCO's work as a traditional "arts and literature". But, following the 1982 World Conference on Cultural Policies in Mexico, it was established that "in its widest sense, culture may be said to be the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterise a society and social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs".

According to the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, cultural diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. It refers to the "manifold ways in which the cultures of social groups and societies find expression". According to this definition, the conservation of cultural diversity thus implies maintaining and developing existing cultures while ensuring openness to other cultures. Its obligatory provisions exclusively comprise: diversity of cultural expression, that is diversity in the creation, as well as the production, distribution, communication,

exhibition and sale of cultural content, whatever its medium or form, existing or to be invented.

The first part of the Convention contains Objectives (Article 1) and Guiding Principles (Article 2). More precisely, Article 1 lists nine objectives concerning protection and promotion, development of cultural policies, the link between culture and development and "interculturality"; meanwhile, Article 2 establishes various guiding principles, particularly the principle of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms (provided in paragraph 1). According to Article 3, the Convention "shall apply to the policies and measures adopted by the parties related to the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions". Article 4 provides a definition for the term "cultural content", which is identified as referring to "symbolic meaning, the artistic dimension, and cultural values that originate from express cultural identities", "cultural expressions", "cultural activities goods and services", "cultural industries", "cultural policies" and "interculturality".

The Convention identifies that "cultural diversity forms a common heritage of humanity" and considers that "the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions presuppose the recognition of equal dignity of and respect for all cultures." Furthermore, the Convention recognises that "cultural activities, goods and services have both an economic and a cultural nature, because they convey identities, values and meanings, and must therefore not be treated as solely having commercial value."

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