

Party reforms must

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priority, not any individual or any leader," said Suranji adding, "the protector has become the aggressor in politics".

He said the nation today is gripped by a crisis caused by severe degradation of politics. The nation must be saved from the political degradation and reforms are required in political parties as well as in the government. And for this, "major surgeries, not minor ones", will have to be performed harshly, added the AL leader.

Lt Gen Mahbubur Rahman, a former Army chief, said the country's politics took a nosedive due to severe corruption, criminalisation and influence of black money. To save the parties, politics has to be freed from these drawbacks through reforms, added Rahman.

"If the party chairperson does not believe in reforms and holds on to old conjectures, she will be rejected by the people," said the BNP leader.

Russia wants freeze on US missile plan

AP, Moscow

Russia's foreign minister urged the United States yesterday to freeze plans for missile defense installations in Eastern Europe during negotiations and warned that the proposal intended to serve as a buffer against Iran could backfire.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's comments, reported by Russian news agencies, suggested the Kremlin is unhappy that the United States has continued discussions on its plans to deploy facilities in Poland and the Czech Republic following Russia's counteroffer of joint use of a radar station in Azerbaijan.

"It's necessary for Washington, at a minimum, to freeze the deployment of missile defense elements in Europe for a period of study and negotiations on the Russian proposal," ITAR-Tass quoted Lavrov as saying.

Lavrov also warned that the U.S. missile defense plans could hamper efforts to ease international concerns about Iran's nuclear program, RIA-Novosti reported. The United States has said the missile defense shield is intended to protect against a potential Iranian threat.

Lavrov said there was no proof that Iran was seeking to develop nuclear weapons, but that the missile shield could further provoke the Iranian government, which is already facing international sanctions for its disputed missile fund.

The U.S. system calls for a radar screen in the Czech Republic to watch for missile threats, and 10 interceptor rockets in Poland to shoot down any missiles. Both Bush and Polish President Lech Kaczynski said Friday the system would not threaten Russia. The Kremlin argues that the system would undermine nuclear deterrence.

President Vladimir Putin, who has led Russia's bitter objection to U.S. plans to deploy a missile-defense radar in the Czech Republic and interceptors in Poland, surprised President Bush with the offer of joint use of the radar station in Azerbaijan, which borders Iran.

The probe team also found that many trees around the under-constructed public toilet and canteen inside the Chandrima Udayan were too felled. But it was not mentioned in the tree survey report.

The clique also sold acacia, koroi, and rain trees from the same area for Tk 30,000 and mahogany, jackfruit, and mango trees of the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NITOR) for Tk 21,000. From the two sales, it added only Tk 8,200 to the exchequer.

The same group sold grass of the parliament building lawns for Tk 65,000 to some individuals from Gabtoli. The incident was first of its kind in the Sangsab Bhaban area, the probe reported.

The report says that some people show up at the premises early in the morning and go away with sacksful of grass unchallenged.

The government has appointed 12 gardeners and bought three mowers for them to keep the lawn manicured.

But the accused officials told the probe committee that 12-men garden staff was never enough for the upkeep of such a broad expanse of lawn.

Chief Plantation Officer Emdadul Haq told The Daily Star that he had joined the post just a few months ago. He said he too has heard about the allegations and formed the probe committee.

Following the report, the higher authorities have formed another committee and an investigation is on.

Hasina should quit

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had suddenly announced the Dhaka siege programme urging party activists to march to Dhaka with cars and poles. Party leaders later criticised her decision.

He is now on a three-day remand for further investigation into his alleged anti-state activities. He was taken into custody on March 8, and court had ordered his detention under the Special Powers Act. No case was filed against him till date.

Sources also said that during interrogation, the AL leader also spoke about the recent unrest in garments sector, April 30 (2004) deadline to dislodge the then coalition government, killing of 12 people by setting a bus afire in front of Sheraton Hotel, violent agitation by Juba Mohila League, donation collection and party nomination in polls for money.

Sonali and Tuhin of Juba Mohila League had intentionally engaged in conflict and provoked the police to arrest them to have their photographs published in newspapers. The party chief herself had provoked the women activists to do so, Quader is claimed to have told the interrogators.

The much-talked-about MiG 29 purchase, Quader said businessman Noor Ali, (who was involved in the deal) had paid a huge amount of money to Hasina (then prime minister). Her cousin Sheikh Helal used to take money from all contractors linked to different ministries, and the amount would be hundreds of crores of taka, sources said quoting Quader.

Quader also said that Abdul Awal Mintoo, (who was involved in the frigate purchase) had paid a huge sum to the AL president (then PM).

The party chief (Hasina) used to take huge amount of money to give work order to set up small power plants. No deal was transparent. Prof Rafiq, Sheikh Helal, Sheikh Selim (her cousin) and Farukh Khan made all the deals. Netri (Hasina) took money in all the deals. General Nuruddin was removed from the cabinet as he did not pay her (in case of deals). Nuruddin is a very honest man. Netri (Hasina) is very much dishonest," sources further quoted Quader.

Hasina has a lot of money in the US and those are in the name of her son and daughter. She owns a house in London and she used to stay in that house during her visits there, the detained AL leader is claimed to have said.

According to sources, Quader also talked about collection of funds for opposition movement during 2006-2007. He said, "Kazi Zafarullah (party leader) and Alaudin Nasim (Hasina's PS) looked after financial matters regarding the movement. Sometimes, Tofal Ahmed also collected funds for the agitation. Hasina herself accepted the money."

Govt firm

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The CA said besides holding a fair election, which is the main task of the government, its goal is also to fight against corruption and to bring the corrupts to justice, according to his Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim, who was present at the meeting.

He said the Election Commission has given an 18-month timeframe to hold the election and the government is assisting in their tasks.

As the delegation dwelt on Election Commission's consultation with political parties, the CA said the Election Commission would determine elections at the earliest, Michaelis said.

Regarding withdrawal of the ban on indoor politics, the CA said the caretaker government is aware of it and the ban will be lifted in due time.

He said the media here are fully free and acting as a link between the government and the people. "People are our main strength. We are being tested everyday," he told the Troika delegation.

The members of the delegation said they are highly impressed with the present caretaker government's policies and reforms, adding that as far as they met and talked with different groups in last four days, they got positive remarks about the government's consistent policies.

Even during the meetings with Awami League and BNP, the two parties did not make criticism about the caretaker government's reforms and policies, the delegation told the CA.

They said they fully support the caretaker government's policies and reform and will prepare a report on the outcome of their mission and send a copy of it to the caretaker government.

Henin

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Ivanovic's nervous play to win 6-1, 6-2.

Henin closed out the victory with a forehand volley winner, then flipped her racket, buried her head in her hands, leaned on the net and exhaled.

"It's surreal to win for the third time in a row," the Belgian said. "I am struggling to take it in."

She became the first woman since Monica Seles in 1990-92 to win three consecutive Roland Garros titles, and only the second since 1937.

Serb teenager Ivanovic started well before her play deteriorated. Ivanovic committed 26 unforced errors to 13 for Henin and also double-faulted five times.

Henin won the French Open for the first time in 2003 and now has six Grand Slam titles, moving her ahead of Venus Williams and Martina Hingis. She trails only Serena Williams' eight among extra-judicial execution and intimidation of journalists."

They said they have raised these points of concern with the government and urged them to quickly establish a National Human Rights Commission.

"The application of due process and prompt adjudication will be a key indicator of the fight against corruption and help ensure the confidence of the people in the process," the EU team said.

They underlined the need for "clear explanations, as to the reasons for the

Lift politics ban

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they said, adding that they were assured in their meeting with Army chief Moeen U Ahmed that the Army will not 'play a role in politics in the future'.

"We have been told it is 'unrealistic' to expect the completion of the voter list before 2008. If the whole process is completed by mid-2008 or September 2008, you should not wait further to hold elections. That is what we mean by holding elections at the earliest," Michaelis said.

"So far we have not received any indication that the [reform] process is not on track," he said, when asked if he was satisfied with the speed of the process.

It is important to build 'sound foundations' before holding elections, he said.

The delegation said they were satisfied with the Election Commission's plan to announce an 'election roadmap' by July 15, and they will determine their financial support for creating a new voter roll after a United Nations consultants' team finish preliminary assessments.

Michaelis, however, said they suggested that the government should look at an early lifting of the ban on indoor politics in the country and take specific measures allowing political parties to engage in all aspects of electoral reform.

He said holding elections is not only a governance and a technical matter, but also a political matter, and as such, "Political parties have to play a role."

"The European Union recognises the indispensable role of the political parties in the democratic process and feel their perspective needs to be taken into account in due time," said Michaelis, adding, we have asked the government to facilitate their early participation.

The EU team also urged the political parties to act as the 'avant-garde' of political reform to regain 'credibility' and support of the people, and also to receive EU backing.

Regarding human rights, the EU expressed its "deep concern at reports of torture and inhuman treatment of detainees, continuing incidents of extra-judicial execution and intimidation of journalists".

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"The application of due process and prompt adjudication will be a key indicator of the fight against corruption and help ensure the confidence of the people in the process," the EU team said.

None of the EU Troika delegation agreed to talk with the reporters.

The five-member delegation arrived Dhaka on June 6 on a four-day visit to get a firsthand view of the country's pre-election political situation.

EC tests voter listing

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The Daily Star yesterday.

He said all preparations have been completed. "We have been informed that a festive mood is prevailing in the area," he said.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda, Chief of Army Staff General Moeen U Ahmed and two election commissioners Sahul Hossain and Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhawat Hossain are scheduled to attend the inaugural ceremony of the pilot project this morning.

Bangladesh Army is assisting the EC in carrying out the pilot project by providing manpower and logistic support.

Local administration and election office have completed all preparatory tasks and enumerators have already started distributing the voter registration forms among the eligible people. People have been asked to visit the registration centres to have their photographs and fingerprints taken so that it could be incorporated into the voter list and national ID cards.

The EC is currently considering sending enumerators to make door-to-door visits to collect particulars of prospective voters and asking the voters to visit the registration centres to have their photographs taken when the nationwide voter enrolment and national ID cards.

Besides, the EC formed separate committees comprising local government officials and public representatives to oversee the task and encourage people to register themselves in the voter list by visiting the registration centres.

Koko owns Dubai house

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who is now in jail, has said he has only \$1 million with him.

Warid owned by Sheikh Nahayan Mubarak Al Nahayan of the UAE obtained its operating licence in 2005 and the deal was since then seen with suspicion as the group paid a small amount -- only \$50 million -- to the government for the deal.

Throughout the BNPL-led four-party rule, Koko remained a low-key figure in the Khaleda family and let his elder brother Tarique take a leading role in politics and corrupt private deals. But staying out of public scrutiny, Koko made his fortunes from various shady and illegal businesses. His only publicly known business was of billboard advertisement, which also smacks of allegations of monopolising.

Meantime, the government exchequer has received Tk 435.45 crore until June 6 that the joint forces recovered from different corrupt suspects and business groups involved in shady deals.

Sources said another Tk 100 crore is expected to be deposited by end of this week.

James Finlay, a British tea company, deposited Tk 237.65 crore to the Bangladesh Bank on April 19 as part of the money taken out against itself of its tea estates in Sylhet. MGH Group owned by Anis Ahmed Gorky deposited Tk 23.80 crore on April 23 as part of a deal to return the money he kept from Khaleda's son Tarique Rahman.

Bashundhara Group returned Tk 77 crore on May 28. Kazi Saleemul Haque, a director of Prime Bank, returned Tk 20 crore on May 30 on behalf of Babar, who received the money from Bashundhara Group

arrest, the possibility for bail, access to lawyers and family when in detention and swift disposal of cases by the courts."

The team also encouraged the government to improve conditions of Rohingya refugees and work towards full implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord in consultations with indigenous representatives.

During their four-day visit, the team met Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed, Law Adviser Mainul Hosen, Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Army chief General Moeen U Ahmed, Chief Election Commissioner ATM Shamsul Huda, an Anti-Corruption Commission commissioner, and leaders of the BNP and Awami League.

MEETS

The European Union (EU) Troika delegation yesterday stressed the need for lifting the ban on indoor politics soon so that the political parties can sit with the Election Commission (EC) and the caretaker government over reforms.

The delegation was quoted as saying when some Awami League (AL) leaders called on them at the Gulshan residence of the German ambassador and discussed the prevailing situation in the country.

"It was a fruitful discussion," AL Presidium Member Abdur Razzak told the reporters emerging from the meeting with Troika delegation. "We informed them about the need for removal of the ban on indoor politics," he added.

The EU team also urged the political parties to act as the 'avant-garde' of political reform to regain 'credibility' and support of the people, and also to receive EU backing.

Meanwhile, the AL chief yesterday expressed her utter dissatisfaction to see excessive restrictions imposed by security personnel on the visitors to her Sudha Sadan residence.

While coming out of the residence for Shikdar hospital at about 11:20am, the AL chief noticed a local AL leader of Dhamman waiting in a wheel chair at the entrance as the on-duty policemen did not allow him to enter the house.

Observing that his party is for the reform always, Razzak said that the AL had brought reforms within their party in the past. He, however, noted that more reforms are needed.

"It is the politicians who will practise politics," the AL leader said adding, "For that we need proper environment."

Meanwhile, AL Presidium Member Tofail Ahmed said that their party believes in reform but at present the party does not have the opportunity of exercising political rights.

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Hasina

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aunt Achhina Khatun, sister of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

"If the budget is not aimed at mitigating people's sufferings, what can be expected of it? No step has been taken to check price hike and reduce inflation. There is no plan for employment too," the AL chief said.

"The actual inflation rate is much higher than has been shown. The inflation in food prices is near 25 per cent."

"According to our constitution, the budget should be placed before an elected parliament. Elected people's representatives [lawmakers] will pass the budget, otherwise there remains the question of legality," she added.

"Constitutionally, no tax can be imposed without people's representation. How will they [caretaker government] explain and justify it?"

"Under article 93 of the constitution, the president can issue an ordinance...but it is for a short time and that too is to be passed in parliament."

"Growth rate was above six per cent during the end of our tenure while inflation rate was 1.95 per cent," the former prime minister said, adding, "During the five years of our government, prices of essentials were stable. Now the situation has changed. People can hardly live with what they earn."