

No talks with EC until politics ban goes

Reiterates Zillur
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Acting president of Awami League (AL) Zillur Rahman yesterday said it is not possible to prepare a complete and accurate voter list without participation of the political parties. Addressing a press briefing at his Gulshan residence, he reiterated that the AL would not sit with the Election Commission (EC) to talk over electoral reforms unless the government lifts the ban on indoor politics. "For discussion, the Election Commission will issue letter to me as the party's acting president or to the general secretary. But none of us can make the final decision on the issue before discussing it at the party forum," observed the veteran AL leader.

He also said that the government should allow AL President Sheikh Hasina to talk to her son, daughter and sister over phone that, he said, is permitted in the existing jail code.

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Taiwanese firm at DEPZ axes 2,602 workers

UNB, Savar

Some 2,602 workers of Taiwanese owned Ring Sign Textiles Factory in Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ) have been retrenched.

The workers were yesterday surprised to see the notice of closure of the factory for an indefinite period and retrenchment of workers when they came to resume their duties after weekend.

Knowing nothing about the reason for retrenchment and closure of the factory, the workers became unrest and threatened to launch a movement against the action of the management, police said.

The law enforcers dispersed the angry workers. They are strictly guarding the factory to ward off untoward incident.

Captain (ret) Shahidur Rahman, newly appointed general manager of the factory, was not available for comments.

An official of the factory said the authorities will clear all dues of the workers on September 7.

Govt on Ramadan price alert

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A meeting of the council of advisers yesterday decided to take measures to keep a lid on the rising price of essential food items as there is fear of an impending fall in agricultural production especially during Ramadan.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation has informed the government that it predicts likely fall of production due to floods, Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim told a press briefing at the Chief Adviser's Office after the meeting.

Expressing similar concerns, the World Bank at a recent meeting said this would directly lead to a further rise in food prices.

The Ministry of Commerce and Bangladesh Rifles yesterday made two separate presentations at the weekly meeting of the council of advisers outlining the present price situation and their plans to accelerate the ongoing programmes in a planned way to selectively cut or reduce import tariffs on essentials and introduce open market sale.

The government will also relax the opening hours of shops during Ramadan, but will also come down

hard on roadside 'iftari' stalls that disturb traffic flows, Munaim told the media.

He said the government has decided to increase the ceiling of donation for the president's disaster relief fund to Tk 1 crore from the present Tk 50 lakh.

He said the council also decided to approve a World Bank funded project for legal and judicial capacity building, by improving case management and court administration reforms. This will also look to providing necessary powers to the government and chief justice to expedite the process.

The approval would expand the jurisdiction of the project to five more districts -- Rajshahi, Chittagong, Barisal, Mymensingh and Sylhet. Presently the project is under experiment in Khulna, Gazipur, Comilla and Dhaka.

Pressed on whether President Iajuddin Ahmed would step down at the end of his five-year tenure on September 6, Munaim said, "This is a constitutional government, so it will follow the constitution on such matters."

Munaim said both the commerce ministry and the BDR cited

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PHOTO: STAR

A farmer in Shibpur, Narsingdi prepares his land for transplanting paddy seedlings. Many like him are doing the same across the country as the floodwaters have started to recede in a number of districts.



PHOTO: STAR

Shanties are built devouring the land of the Shialbari Lake in Mirpur Section-7 in the capital. The residents of these shanties are also contributing to the pollution of the lake water.

Community-based early warning system seen key to fighting flood

FIDA-E-TASHFIA

An innovative community-based early flood warning system may hold the key to reducing the loss of lives and livelihoods during devastating floods like the one engulfing the country at present.

The Community Flood Information System (CFIS) project provides a localised early warning system that empowers those who are best placed to undertake preparedness measures against flooding -- local government units and communities.

CFIS is being jointly implemented in two study areas in Bangladesh by the Centre for Environmental and Geographic Information Services (CEGIS), a public trust under the Bangladesh Ministry of Water Resources, and an American firm called Riverside Technologies Inc (RTI).

Timothy Martin, project manager for RTI, Ahmadul Hassan and Mollah Md Awlad Hossain, senior

water resources engineers at CEGIS, have jointly developed the WATSURF model, a software that takes into account the physiography of flood plains to predict how changes in the water levels of major rivers will affect specific inland areas.

"The Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) forecasts the water levels in the large rivers only, but people who do not live in close proximity to those rivers cannot derive from that how much water will rise in their village. What CFIS does is contextualise the FFWC predictions for local use, and relay that information directly to local government officials and households," said Ahmadul Hassan.

The project has enjoyed huge success in its two pilot areas, Nagorpur upazila in Tangail district and Daulatpur upazila in Manikganj district.

Information generated from the WATSURF model is faxed daily to

various district offices and the upazila offices. At the union level locally based volunteers receive coded SMS daily which informs them how much the water level is about to rise or fall in their specific area by next 48 hours, and they put this information up daily on designated bulletin boards at the union parishad offices.

Md Hasanuzzaman, upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) of Daulatpur, said, "The daily updates are extremely useful to us. We can be very alert, and also alert the community to evacuate if necessary. At the same time, we can use the information for future planning, such as preparing disaster relief."

At the community level, daily SMS are sent to local volunteers who put up colour-coded flags to warn the people. The messages are simple: blue flag indicates a potential bighat (the local unit, equivalent to 9 inches) rise of water level by next 48 hours, and a white flag

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Hurricane Dean barrels thru' Caribbean

AP, Santo Domingo

Jamaica opened shelters nationwide on Saturday and Cuba declared a "state of alert" as the Caribbean's warm waters fueled a strengthening Hurricane Dean, with forecasters predicting the storm could grow to a powerful Category 5.

Now a Category 4 storm with sustained winds at 150 mph, Dean was expected to pass south of Hispaniola but dump as much as five inches of rain in the two countries on the island Haiti and the Dominican Republic which are both prone to devastating floods and mudslides.

As dark clouds rolled in from the south and a light rain began to fall, residents of the Dominican capital, Santo Domingo, calmly ran

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Car bomb kills 15 in Afghanistan

A dozen Taliban killed in clash, German woman kidnapped

AP, AFP, Kandahar

A suicide car bomber detonated near a convoy of private security forces yesterday in southern Afghanistan, killing four Afghan guards and 11 civilians, including three women and two children, police said.

The bomb went off west of Kandahar city and also wounded six other guards as well as 20 civilians who were in two minivans passing by the convoy, said Kandahar provincial police chief Syed Agha Saqib.

Saqib said the guards worked for the US Protection and Investigations security firm, but USPI could not immediately be reached for comment or to confirm that their employees were attacked.

Five women and three children were among the civilians wounded. Women and children's shoes were scattered about the area. A stuffed animal toy was left in one of the destroyed minivans.

Meanwhile, nearly a dozen insurgents were killed after an ambush on a joint patrol of Afghan police and coalition troops in Afghanistan's

restive southern Helmand province, the US-led force said.

There were no losses among the police or coalition soldiers, it added in a statement late Friday.

US military spokeswoman Captain Vanessa Bowman said it was the third such failed attack in that area in recent days.

The statement said around 20 insurgents attacked the patrol with mortars, rocket-propelled grenades and small arms fire near a village.

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Cop sent to jail on rape charge

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sent an assistant sub-inspector (ASI) of police to jail on charge of raping a garment factory worker.

Abdul Mannan, ASI of Mirpur police station, was arrested after a garment factory worker of Daksin Pirebagh filed a rape case against him with the police station yesterday.

In her complaint, the victim said Abdul Mannan forced the inhabitants of her house to go out and raped her on Thursday night.

The victim was sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) for medical test yesterday.

Get closer fast to cut poverty to zero

Yunus asks South Asian nations

UNB, Colombo

Nobel laureate Professor Mohammad Yunus yesterday urged the South Asian nations to get closer quickly by resolving conflicts to slash poverty to zero in the region.

"We spent more time for falling apart than coming closer. But we can come together because it is the question of our survival, our dignity," he made the remarks in his keynote speech at the sixth conference of the South Asian Free Media Association (Safma) at Hotel Cinnamon.

Yunus said, "Whatever conflicts are there among the Saarc nations--

India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, or wherever--it should be resolved quickly... There is no alternative."

He called for timeline to send poverty to museum from the South Asian society. All actions of the nations should be focused on achieving that goal, he said.

"If we could reduce poverty by half by 2015 in line with the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), why would we not be able to achieve zero poverty by 2030?" he posed the question, underlining the need for the nations to make their own planning for eliminating poverty and attaining prosperity. "Should we set our target by our-

selves or wait for the West to set our target?" he shot a supplementary salvo through the media to the South Asian leaders.

Prof Yunus said the media will have to speak out for tiding over the problems on way to getting together and playing a robust role in advancing the South Asian vision to defeat the cycle of poverty.

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Rathnasiri Wickramanayake inaugurated the two-day conference. Sri Lankan Information Minister Anura Priodarsana Yapa and Science and Technology Minister

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Interpol issues wanted notice for Saddam's daughter

AFP, Baghdad

The international police organisation Interpol yesterday issued a wanted notice for Saddam Hussein's eldest daughter, who is sought by the Iraqi government on suspicion of terrorism.

Interpol's "Red Notice" is not an international arrest warrant but is a request for foreign police forces to cooperate in tracking down 38-year-old Raghda Hussein and in extraditing her to face justice in Iraq.

"A judicial order was issued against Raghda a year ago by the Central Criminal Court accusing her of funding terrorism," Iraqi interior ministry operations

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PHOTO: STAR

A lighter vessel sank in stormy weather at the outer anchorage of Chittagong Port early yesterday. The photograph was taken from Patenga beach yesterday. Story on page 3.

Turkish plane hijacking drama ends peacefully

AP, Ankara

Two men who hijacked a Turkish passenger plane in an apparent protest against the US surrendered to authorities yesterday after holding some crewmembers and passengers hostage for more than four hours. No one was hurt.

The men claimed to be carrying a bomb and demanded that the Atlasjet Airlines plane headed from northern Cyprus to Istanbul be diverted to Iran. The plane, which had taken off from northern Cyprus headed for Istanbul, landed at Antalya airport after pilots said they needed to refuel.

"The adventure that started early in the morning finally came to an end," said Tuncay Doganer, the

CEO of Atlasjet. "With the two hijackers having surrendered, the incident ended with no bloodshed."

Most of the passengers had escaped the plane from the rear exit at Antalya airport while the hijackers were releasing women and children. But the hijackers held some six crew and passengers for around four hours before allowing them to leave the plane and later surrendering to authorities.

"All passengers and crew members are currently in the lounge of Antalya airport and all are well," Doganer said.

Salih Usar, the transportation ministry of the breakaway Turkish Cypriot state, said earlier that the two hijackers were protesting against the United States, NTV

reported. He didn't offer any more details.

Turkey's Transport Minister Osman Gunes said one hijacker is Turkish, while the other is believed to be Palestinian carrying a Syrian passport.

Passenger Erhan Erkul told NTV that the hijackers ran toward the cockpit shortly after takeoff, tried to break down the door but failed.

"They claimed to have bombs," Erkul said.

A female passenger, who was not identified, said the hijackers allowed the crew to serve water to the passengers.

Passengers speaking to NTV and CNN-Turk said the hijackers spoke

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Fresh depression threatens to make flooding worse

UNB, Dhaka

The well-marked low over northwest Bay moved slightly northwestwards, intensified into a monsoon depression and was crossing the Sundarbans' coast near Raimongal river at 6:00pm yesterday.

It is likely to move in a northwesterly direction, said a warning

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Prayer Timing		
August 19		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-25	5-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-38	6-41
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation