

Political parties

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she asked adding that they would have to sit first at the party level to take decision in this regard.

Talking to The Daily Star, Motia said they too want a dialogue with the EC but for that to happen the government must create an atmosphere congenial to fruitful discussions.

Brig Gen (retd) Hannan Shah, an adviser to the BNP chairperson, said the party will not participate in the talks if the ban on politics is not lifted.

BNP Joint Secretary General Ashraf Hossain, an influential figure in the pro-reform camp, came up with the similar view. He said an environment conducive to holding discussions has yet to be there as political activities are still prohibited.

"I think the government should lift the restrictions on politics to

open the way for an effective dialogue over the electoral reforms," he told The Daily Star last night.

BNP Joint Secretary General Nazrul Islam Khan said they would give a formal reaction on receipt of the official invitation from the EC.

Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid termed the EC initiative a positive move. He told The Daily Star that he hopes the interim administration would soon allow indoor politics and let them decide at the party forum on what they should bring up for discussion with the EC.

Welcoming the EC's decision, Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon called on the government to lift the ban on indoor politics to make the dialogue effective.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) President Hasanul Haque Inu said withdrawal of the ban on political activities is an essential precondition for the talks to be successful.

With the ban still in effect, the EC initiative will create further bottlenecks instead of solving the problems, he observed in a statement yesterday.

Gonotritri Party President Nurul Islam described the EC move as positive, and said they would sit with the commission though it would be hard to do so as the party's central committee cannot meet formally amid the ban.

He told The Daily Star that before joining the dialogue he would talk to his colleagues over telephone.

Jatiya Party (Ershad) Presidium Member Ziauddin Bablu said they view the EC initiative for discussions as a good sign, and would decide on the matter after getting a formal letter from the EC.

Bangladesh Jatiya Party President Nazim Rahman Manzur told The Daily Star that they would first sit at the party forum given that the ban on indoor politics goes in a short time. "We will think things over if we receive an official invitation," he noted.

Foreign funds

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its cooperation in fighting cattle diseases by providing vaccines. The UNFPA is working in the flood-affected areas to ensure health of expectant mothers.

The government hopes to get an adequate quantity of relief materials from the central Emergency Response Fund of the UN.

Besides, the Foreign Ministry has asked Bangladesh missions abroad to keep contact with the concerned countries, welfare organisations and expatriate Bangladeshis regarding flood situation in the country.

Meanwhile, cheques received from expatriate Bangladeshis have been given to the Chief Adviser's Relief Fund.

5 Ctg JMB men

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alias Shahadat Ali and Abdul Malek alias Laltu was filed with Kotwali Police Station.

The same court framed charges against Rafiqul Islam alias Javed and Javed Iqbal alias Mohammad for possessing illegal firearms and explosives which law enforcers recovered from the port city's Kattali area on December 13, 2005.

A case was filed against them with Pahartali Police Station the following day.

The court earlier dropped the names of three JMB kingpins -- Abdur Rahman, Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai and Ataur Rahman Sunny -- from the charge sheets of the cases following their executions late last March.

Shajahan family

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detained former state minister Amanullah Aman yesterday.

CASE AGAINST SIRAJ FAMILY
Assistant Commissioner of National Board of Revenue (NBR) Rahima Khatun, Assistant Tax Commissioner of NBR Pratap Chandra Pal and Deputy Tax Commissioner of NBR Abul Kalam Azad filed 11 cases against Siraj, his wife and son on July 16.

Of the cases, five were against Rabeya Haider, five against Rajib Siraj and one against Shajahan Siraj.

In the cases, the complainants alleged that the accused had evaded a huge amount of tax upon their income for several years.

The plaintiffs also alleged that the accused gave false information to the income tax department about their income and expenditure and did not show their income tax returns.

Senior Special Judge Mohammad Azizul Haq of Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka, issued arrest warrants against the three on July 17 following filing of the cases as the charges brought against them were preliminarily found to be true.

Meanwhile, the three have been absconding since filing of the

DU violence

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public administration at DU, gave his account of the recent DU incident around 4:45pm yesterday, the commission's first working day. Prof Kalimullah was the first person to give statement to the commission after it formally started its work at 11:00am yesterday.

To a private television channel yesterday Prof Kalimullah said he gave the commission a detailed account of the events he observed.

The probe commission, formed to investigate the recent violence on DU campus, was given a 15-day timeframe to submit its report.

Justice Habibur Rahman said the commission would submit its report on why the incidents occurred and who were the people involved.

If the commission finds that the DU incident spilled over into the capital, those incidents would also be reported in the commission's report, he said.

"We are also thinking about investigating the incidents that occurred in Rajshahi University bringing those within the purview of this commission," he added.

The commission would take into account statements of students, army personnel involved and a number of DU teachers.

Asked how does he expect to get students' accounts when law enforcers are trying to identify students from video footages and sue them, and when the dormitories have been vacated, the Justice said he is also concerned about this problem.

Justice Rahman said the commission would ask the government to ensure security of the students who would give their accounts before the commission.

He suggested that if the commission did not get a satisfactory number of students' accounts, the tenure of the commission could be extended. When the university activities resume, students would certainly be available for having their accounts recorded before the commission, he said.

In order to record accounts, the commission prepared a 20-question questionnaire on the violence. People interested in giving their accounts can get the questionnaire from the commission's office and send their replies to the commission via mail, said Khurshid Alam, deputy secretary of the home ministry, now attached to the commission.

Shab-e-Barat

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Bangladesh Television (BTV), Bangladesh Betar and private TV channels will air special programmes, while newspapers will publish articles, highlighting the significance of the night.

Dinkal

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Abdul Mannan, deputy registrar of the Joint Stock Companies, filed the case under section 36(5) of the Companies Act 1994 with the CMM Court.

Court sources said the complainant alleged that the political big shots were the directors of the company registered with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies in 1999. But, he alleged, they "haven't submitted service return since its formation."

TH Khan, assisted by Afzal H. Khan, Barrister Nawshad Zamir, Barrister Nasiruddin Ashim and Barrister Fatema Anwar, appeared for the company.

Following the High Court judgment, Shamsur Rahman Shimul Biswas, managing editor of the daily Dinkal, in a statement said there is no nexus between the defunct company and the daily Dinkal newspaper. "Regular publication of the newspaper will continue," he said.

Saarc transport

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placed in the ministerial meet. The ministerial meet will be preceded by an expert-level meeting today (August 29) followed by an inter-governmental expert group meeting on August 30, said official sources.

One of the proposals in the Saarc Regional Motor Vehicle Agreement states that citizens of any member country would be able to drive through Saarc countries in their personal cars for personal purposes such as attending a friend's wedding. The visitors would receive three-day visas and they would encounter minimum hassles at border check posts.

India is expected to introduce this visa and travel facility from next month, official sources added. Sources said the draft, modelled after the system developed by the European Union, also recommends ways to do away with physical and non-physical barriers in the way of regional transport movement and to facilitate smooth movement of goods. At present, there is very limited point-to-point transport service in the region, communications ministry sources said.

The three-day meet will also discuss the viability of a multi-modal transport study that identified 16 roads, rail tracks, aviation route, shipping and inland corridors in the region to ensure connectivity.

Electoral reform talks

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Amid such a situation, the EC at a meeting on Monday finalised the schedule for the talks selecting 15 political parties for invitations on the basis of three criteria.

To be eligible for an invitation to the talks a political party must have secured at least one parliamentary seat in any general election since Bangladesh's independence, or it must have secured at least 2 percent of cast votes in any general election since the independence, or it must have committees in 32 districts and in all upazila headquarters under those districts with a minimum of 1,000 members in each district unit and 2,000 members in each upazila unit.

"Based on the information the EC Secretariat has, we selected 15 political parties for the talks. If any party's name has been dropped, it may apply to us," CEC Huda said.

If a political party fails to meet any of the first two criteria, it will have to apply to the EC showing that it meets the third criterion. "We will verify the information and if satisfied we will invite the political party to sit with us. But we are not interested in sitting with 150 political parties that exist in the country," CEC Huda said.

The dialogues will be kicked off on September 12 with the EC and Mufti Fazlul Haque Amini-led Islami Oikya Jote sitting for a talk, and the series will end with a talk between the commission and the Samayabadi Dal of Bangladesh on November 29.

According to the dialogue schedule prepared in Bangla alphabetical order, the EC will sit with Bangladesh Awami League on November 4, and with Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) on November 22.

The schedules for talks with other parties are, September 16 for Krishak Samik Janata League, September 20 for Ganotantrik Dal, September 27 for Jatiya Party (Ershad), October 4 for Jatiya Party (Manju), October 9 for Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Inu), October 22 for Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Rab), October 25 for Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, October 28 for National Awami Party (Mozaffar), November 11 for the Workers Party of Bangladesh, November 15 for Bangladesh Jatiya Party (Nazim), and November 25 for the Communist Party of Bangladesh.

The CEC said the EC Secretariat will start sending the invitations and drafts of the electoral reform proposals to the secretaries general or general secretaries of the selected parties and all the invitations will reach the parties within a week.

He said the agenda of the dialogues will focus on the draft proposals for amending the Representation of the People Order 1972, Political Party Registration Act 2001, and the Election Codes of

Conduct 1996.

Besides, discussions on a proposal for introducing transparent ballot boxes might also be held.

The CEC, who earlier on April 4 at a meeting with the law adviser had asked the government to lift the ban on indoor politics allowing the EC to hold talks with the parties, yesterday said the commission announced the schedule for the talks following a consultation with the government.

Asked what if the ban is neither lifted nor relaxed, the CEC said the EC will inform the government of its steps and the government certainly will take measures to help implement the commission's plans.

"Our roadmap was announced after showing it to the government and it had assured us of its support," he said.

The EC on July 15 announced a complete roadmap to the next parliamentary election stipulating a timeframe, according to which talks with the political parties for finalising the plan for electoral reforms is supposed to be held between September and November this year.

On April 5, the commission had disclosed a set of proposals for electoral reforms and announced its plan for holding talks with the parties, but it could not proceed with it due to the ban on indoor politics.

RMG export

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notification," says the statement on objective of the amended law.

The council meeting also approved an amended proposal on policy guidelines of the government for the purchase of electricity from Captive Power Plants (CPPs).

Under the policy guidelines, the government can purchase per-unit electricity at the rate of Tk 2.23 from the CPPs. It also extends the period of agreement with a CPP to three years from six months.

The Council of Advisers reviewed the post-flood rehabilitation programme in the flood-affected districts, according to CA's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Minaim.

Thanking the advisers for performing well their flood and relief-monitoring tasks in the respective assigned districts, the chief adviser urged them to go to the flood-hit districts to see for themselves the rehabilitation activities.

He also asked for utilising the maintenance budget of the respective ministries for repairing work as necessary for various infrastructures damaged by the recent floods.

All members of the Advisory Council, the cabinet secretary and the secretaries concerned were present attended the meeting at the Chief Adviser's Office.

Garment sector

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grown rapidly in recent years but in the 12 months to June 30 exports rose by a modest 16.5 percent, compared to 23.12 percent in 2005-06.

Anwar-UI-Alam Chowdhury blamed the slowdown on a weakened US economy and the unprecedented rioting at garment industries in and around Dhaka for 8 weeks when nearly 400 factories, most of which are socially compliant, were damaged and the DEPZ (Dhaka Export Processing Zone) was shut down twice.

The BGMEA boss said buyers placed 22-25 percent less orders last year and moved to new destinations in South East Asia.

Representatives of several local and foreign buying offices also confirmed shifting of significant orders, mainly to Vietnam and Cambodia, the two countries that emerged as potential competitors in the world clothing market with yearly growth of over 34 percent in knitwear items.

Country representative of a prominent German importer Obermeyer, AK Kamrul Alam, said that his buyers placed about 20 percent less orders last year mainly due to labour unrest and poor sales. Interestingly though, his buyers increased orders significantly in Vietnam, Cambodia and China.

Leading Italian chain store Gruppo Coin SPA has reduced its orders in Bangladesh to half, while at the same time piling up orders in India. Meanwhile, almost all the top buyers including American giant Wal-Mart cut down orders significantly due to the weakened US market and changing weather patterns in Europe that dictate season-based product sales.

The BGMEA president hopes for a turnaround in October, the period for the placement of bulk winter orders. "We might not have achieved the EPB target this time, but still the export volume from readymade garments grew from \$7.9 billion to \$9.2 billion in last fiscal year," he said.

But that 16.59 percent export growth has not calmed the frayed nerves of garment manufacturers, a majority of whom have hardly any orders till October and fear how they will cope with fixed overhead costs and salaries.

FBCCI

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5 percent import duty on edible oil, he said there is a scope of reducing the price further by withdrawing value-added tax (VAT) from it.

He said FBCCI is requesting the traders concerned to keep the retail price of oil fixed following negotiations between Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and the oil refiners' associations recently.

Responding to a complaint that per litre edible oil is being sold at Tk 85 or more against the fixed price of Tk 80 in retail market, MA Rouf Chowdhury of Bangladesh Vegetable Oil Refiners and Vanaspati Manufacturers' Association said his organisation could monitor the price only in the wholesale market.

"Over two lakh retail shops sell edible oil and it is impossible for the association to monitor them. You have to lodge complaints with the BDR to take actions against the retailers who sell per litre edible oil for more than Tk 80," he said.

Mir Nasir Hossain said the government should allow the importers to buy dollars at a competitive rate from any bank. It should also ensure that the exchange rate during opening LCs is considered the base rate.

The government must stop assessment of income tax considering the 10 percent gross profit (GP), as profit from wholesale of essential commodities is very limited, he said asking the businessmen not to sell adulterated products.

The FBCCI observed that the government should regularly record the international market prices of commodities and their prices after import.

Asked if syndicates are active in businesses, Mir Nasir Hossain said theoretically, syndicates do not exist in free market economy.

"However, many large businesses have grown in the country over time following government policies. Their influence might have been there in the market. This is a common phenomenon," he said.

When asked how the FBCCI can keep the prices of essentials stable during Ramadan, he said consumption of food items during this particular period doubles. "This should also be considered in fixing the price of essentials," he added.

FBCCI leaders Mohammad Ali and Abdul Awal Mintoo, among others, were present.

Tarique's wealth

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recommending submission of a first information report (FIR) for concealing information and acquiring wealth beyond his known sources of income.

Asked whether the commission does not have enough evidence against Tarique, the ACC secretary said, "I have enough evidence in the form of bank statements, any cheque, demand draft, any transaction or bank statement for six months to one year that are mandatory. Cases were not filed without evidence against those who were convicted. Cases cannot be filed without this type of evidence."

Asked if the commission is re-investigating his wealth statement, he said, "Re-investigation takes place if the report is not accepted. In this case, further inquiry is being conducted."

Replying to a question about reviving the cases against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina filed by the now-defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac), he said, "The important cases filed by Bac will be revived, hopefully within a month."

"A director general (scrutiny), after the appointment, will scrutinise different important aspects and then the cases will be revived," Mokhes said.

Responding to another question, the ACC secretary said different sensitive cases, including those against former President HM Ershad and two former prime ministers that have been stayed or quashed, will be looked into.

UK clarifies

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"Indeed," the spokesman said, "Throughout the tenure of this caretaker government, the UK has consistently urged the government, army and law enforcement agencies to act impartially, with respect for public safety, human rights, media freedoms, due process and the rule of law, in line with Bangladesh's international human rights obligations."

He said, "The UK has coordinated these same messages with its European Union partners in Dhaka and these have been delivered to the caretaker government at the highest levels."

The spokesman further said: "The UK does not seek to offer its own assessment of the nature of the unrest. Our previous comments to the media have recounted the understanding of the government and others that initially spontaneous student protests became imbued with external coordination; that this was a serious disturbance with the potential for strategic consequences, hence the government's decisive action to bring the situation under control."

Barge-mount

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Authorities of West Zone Power Distribution Company, responsible for power distribution in the 22 south-western districts, suggested that Khulna Power Company Limited (KPLC), which owns the twin plants, shut down the troubled plants from January this year.

KPLC, however, did not comply because of the severe power outage endemic in Khulna city. Rezaul Karim said.

Benazir, Sharif

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a 1999 coup and is a key US ally, plans to ask lawmakers in September or October to give him another five-year presidential term.

But his prospects of staying in power have been clouded by a growing clamour for an end to military rule, and by the plans of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, both two-time premiers, to make a political comeback.

However, he said the government has no plans to lift the constitutional ban on prime ministers serving more than two terms a key demand of Benazir and Sharif.

"For now, in our view, this law is right and it is in the interest of the country," Aziz said.

Musharraf faces serious political and legal hurdles if he is to extend his eight-year rule.

He says he wants an alliance of moderates to stiffen efforts to defeat extremists, including Taliban and al-Qaeda militants holed up in Pakistan's northwest, near the Afghan border.

His envoys are engaged in negotiations over a power-sharing deal with Benazir, who fled Pakistan in 1999 to avoid corruption charges and leads the main opposition Pakistan People's Party.

But the talks appear snagged on Benazir's demands, which include Musharraf's resignation as military chief, the watering down of his presidential powers and indemnity from prosecution for former leaders.

In another development a Pakistani cabinet minister and a ruling party MP said Tuesday they had resigned to protest President Pervez Musharraf's plan to remain army chief, in a fresh blow to the embattled military leader.

Ishaq Khan Khakwani, the Minister of State for Information Technology, also called for a process of national reconciliation involving opposition parties who are stepping up pressure on key US anti-terrorism ally Musharraf.

"My stance is well known and I have been saying that President Musharraf should contest the presidential election after shedding his

RU teachers

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were placed on a 10-day remand on August 25.

The teachers were shown arrested in three cases and accused in another case filed under the Emergency Power Rules (EPR).

In the case filed under EPR, the police alleged that the teachers ran a procession a day before the violence calling upon the students to resist attacks on teachers and students of Dhaka University.

The other cases include charges of murder and damaging public properties.

41 Iraq rebels die

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insurgents killed," a military statement said.

American attack helicopters supporting the ground forces killed another 20 suspected insurgents, it said, adding that many weapons were found during the operation.

The military said the clashes occurred when security forces were carrying out a mission to restore essential services to the nearby key town of Khalis.

US and Iraqi forces have been engaged in a series of operations in Diyala, the second most dangerous region in Iraq after Baghdad, in a bid to flush out al-Qaeda militants.

The province, northeast of the capital, has experienced brutal violence since Shia and Sunni sectarian conflict broke out last year across Iraq.

Meanwhile, 27 people were killed and 147 wounded in firefights between police and gunmen during a religious festival in the Iraqi shrine city of Karbala on Tuesday, a senior medical official said.

An AFP correspondent in Karbala said clashes were continuing in the late afternoon and at least three hotels were on fire.

The sound of explosions could be heard and pilgrims who had earlier flooded the streets fled in panic as police tried to clear the city.

With a vehicle ban in force for the duration of the festival, wounded people were being taken to hospitals in hand carts.

Salim Kadhim, director of health services in Karbala, told AFP that the wounded had been ferried to two different hospitals in the city, which was full of pilgrims.

He said 27 people had been killed and 147 wounded, all of them civilians.

Iraqi police declared a curfew and the authorities used loudhailers to order the hundreds of thousands of pilgrims to leave, city police Chief Brigadier General Hamid Raad Shaker said.

Smoke could be seen billowing from the Imam Hussein shrine where the clashes first broke out in the early afternoon.

Major General Abdel Karim Khalaf, interior ministry director of operations, blamed "criminal gangs" for the violence.

"These criminal gangs do not hesitate to kill innocent people," he said.

uniform," Khakwani told AFP. "I think that the president must contest the election on the basis of his performance."

Separately legislator Syed Ali Hasan Gilani, who is also parliamentary secretary for science and technology, said he was also quitting the PML-Q and joining the rival party of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif.

Musharraf has seen his authority greatly eroded since March, when he tried unsuccessfully to remove the Supreme Court's top judge. The move triggered protests that snowballed into a broad campaign against Musharraf's rule.

Last month the court reinstated the judge, raising expectations that it will uphold expected legal challenges to Musharraf's re-election plan.

Last week, the court ruled that Sharif, the prime minister toppled by Musharraf in 1999 and forced into exile, can return home.

Supporters say Sharif, a fierce critic of Musharraf, may arrive in Pakistan early next month, even though government officials have warned that he could be arrested on charges dating back to the coup. (AP AFP)

Rajshahi voters

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Rahman, District Election Officer Sayed Mohammad Musa, Voter Listing Coordinator for RCC Lt Col Taher, Joint Force Commander in Rajshahi Lt Col Sharif, Police Superintendent Didar Ahmed, acting RCC Mayor Rezaunnabi Duda, among others, were present at the function.

"I am happy as the NID will save my vote. I could not vote thrice in the past as I found my vote tendered by someone else," said Mahtab Ali, 50, of the city's Kathalbaria area, who received his NID yesterday.

Aftab Uddin of Kasiadanga, a schoolteacher, said, "I am happy to be first in getting the NID."

Laila Arjumand Banu, a data entry operator, said, "We face difficulties in convincing people about the NIDs for lack of awareness."

Registration of 181,775 voters has been completed since the task began in Rajshahi City Corporation on August 11.

About 2,357 NIDs have been prepared so far and handed over to the district administration for distribution.

Some 908 enumerators, 182 supervisors and 30 assistant registration officers are working at field level in the project.

A total of 540 data entry operators, divided into 37 groups, are also engaged with 250 laptops, high-resolution web cameras and digital finger print readers.

"During the coming hours, the situation will be under control. Our forces are doing great things and other forces are on their way there," Khalaf added.

30 killed

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The soldiers then swept through nearby residential compounds, it said.

"During the search, a trench-bunker system was found and three of the insurgents were killed thereby by direct fire," it said.

In another incident on Monday, Afghan forces backed by US-led coalition soldiers foiled an attempted Taliban ambush in the neighbouring province of Kandahar, killing seven insurgents, the coalition said.

Some remaining militants fled and several weapons were confiscated.