

EC for indoor politics

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leaders are currently helping informally. "It will be more helpful for us if local units of the political parties are able to assist us formally. We hope, they will be able to do that soon," he added.

The field level task of preparing the voter list with photographs will begin at full throttle next month with an aim to having the finalised list ready by October next year, which is the set deadline for it.

In response to the EC's proposals, the caretaker government allowed indoor politics only in the capital on a limited scale with a set of conditions attached, to create an atmosphere conducive to holding electoral reform talks between the commission and political parties.

After indoor politics had been allowed in the capital, EC Huda said the EC had expected the government to allow indoor politics all across the country with similar conditions attached.

According to the EC's electoral roadmap, the government will have to either lift or relax the countrywide state of emergency in phases from January as holding of due elections to local governments is scheduled to begin in January.

The polls to five city corporations, over 4,000 union parishes, and to 140 municipalities are scheduled to be held between January and December 2008. The long overdue elections to 482 upazila parishes across the country are scheduled to be held between November and December next year while the parliamentary election is supposed to be held sometime between October and December of the same year, says the EC's electoral roadmap endorsed by the caretaker government.

"So, we are expecting that the restrictions on indoor politics in district headquarters will be relaxed by December this year paving the way for holding the polls to local governments," the election commissioner said adding that the state of emergency should also be relaxed in those areas where elections will be held.

"Three to four elections to local governments will be held every month in each district when we will start holding a series of polls to local governments," Sakawat said.

All sorts of political activities like holding rallies and meetings are currently banned due to the state of emergency declared on January 11 this year, but the government will have to lift the restrictions to implement the EC's electoral roadmap

regarding local government elections scheduled to start in January. In line with its plan, the EC emphasised holding of overdue polls to city corporations first. It already announced that the polls to Rajshahi and Khulna city corporations will be held sometime between the end of January and February as the voter lists for the areas are almost ready.

Holding of the long overdue polls to Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is scheduled for sometime between March and April next year, while the EC decided to have the voter list for the area ready in January.

The commission is also pondering about holding the elections to Sylhet and Barisal city corporations in early May, the latest month in which the polls to those city corporations may be held staying within the timeframe permitted by the law. The commission is going to start the field level work of voter listing in Sylhet and Barisal city corporations this month with a view to completing the job in a month.

The local government and rural development ministry in a letter last month asked the EC to hold the due polls to local governments as soon as the voter lists for the areas are ready.

Senior officials of the EC Secretariat said apart from holding polls to the city corporations, polls to over 4,000 union parishes will also be due between January and March of the next year.

"According to the electoral roadmap, we will try to hold polls to union parishes of some areas where the voter list will be ready," a senior official said.

Voter lists of many areas will be ready within this year for holding polls to local governments early next year, said the EC official adding that before holding the polls in those areas, voter lists of other areas might also be ready.

Meanwhile in another move the EC is planning to seek the power to cancel candidacies of contestants in local government elections including for city corporations, municipalities, and union parishes, if irregularities are found in election campaigns. Earlier, the commission sought the same power for the parliamentary election too.

The EC is also mulling a provision for restricting retired military and civil servants, and officials of NGOs that run on foreign grants, from contesting in local government polls within three years of their retirement, the commission sources said.

Defaulters of loans and utility bills will also be barred from contesting in local government polls if the ECs plan gets the nod, the sources added.

Election Commissioner Brig Gen (retd) M Sakawat Hussain said the commission is scrutinising the existing rules for local government elections, to update it.

"We will send our proposals to the local government ministry," he said.

The proposed code of conduct by the EC for political parties and electoral candidates in the parliamentary polls are likely to be recommended for local government elections too, the EC sources added.

The proposals are for strict regulations on holding campaign rallies and processions, putting up of posters, graffiti writings, display of banners and festoons, making of caps, constructions of archways and gates, decorative illumination, and use of helicopters for the campaigns.

The EC is also looking for options to remove differences in campaign spending. During the last polls, a mayoral candidate was allowed to spend up to Tk 5 lakh, although there were big differences in numbers of voters in different city corporations.

The number of voters in Dhaka City Corporation was 39.78 lakh during the last elections while the number was 1.63 lakh in Barisal and 1.81 lakh in Sylhet city corporations.

NBR

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income, the NBR chairman said, "An individual may pay tax at any moment he or she wants."

Earlier, NBR extended the deadline for submitting individual tax returns for 2007-08 tax year till October 31.

As the process of recovering the money smuggled offshore began, ACC Secretary Mukhes said, "We might send a director general of investigation to Scotland Yard for training and we might get assistance from our embassy in this regard."

The secretary refused to make any comment on the issue of signing an agreement between Bangladesh and the UK as it is a matter of two states and the concern of government high-ups.

Middleman chain

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The workers however claimed they had paid Tk 2.3 lakh to Tk 2.5 lakh to the middlemen.

Hamidul Haque, a manpower broker in Asrafpur, Meherpur, said he paid Tk 1.95 lakh to recruiting agency Tangail Overseas for sending Shahabuddin to Malaysia.

"Tangail Overseas entrusted Golden Arrow with the responsibility. I don't know how much Tangail Overseas gave to Golden Arrow," he told investigation officer Lokman Hossain Miah, deputy director of BMET, during quizzing.

However, Shahabuddin who hailed from Chuadanga said he had paid Tk 2.3 lakh to Mamunur Rashid, an employee of Hamidul's NGO Sobah in Meherpur.

In response, Hamidul said, "I don't know if Rashid took Tk 2.3 lakh from Shahabuddin. I received from Rashid Tk 1.95 lakh and gave it to Tangail Overseas."

"Rashid was supposed to give me Tk 2.2 lakh from which my share of profit was to be Tk 25,000."

On the other hand, Siraj Mia, managing director of recruiting agency Liza Overseas, said one Rajdoot came to him through his relative Delwar.

"On receiving assurance, I told Delwar to contact Golden Arrow. He paid them Tk 1.75 lakh and subsequently Rajdoot went to Malaysia in April. Unfortunately, he returned home finding no job there," Siraj said.

Rajdoot told the investigation officer he paid Tk 1.98 lakh and his parents sent him Tk 35,000 more when he along with many other workers was unemployed and half-fed or unfed in Malaysia.

Quizzing revealed almost similar amount of money paid to the middlemen and Golden Arrow. But the agency's General Manager SM Fakhru Alam who was present at the hearing told reporters they received only Tk 84,000 from each worker.

"The agency will pay each of the workers claim if they can prove it," he said.

The investigation officer fixed October 29 for another hearing and asked the workers to wait for compensation until then.

The returnees said the ministry's acting secretary during his visit to Malaysia promised them Tk 2.3 lakh each in compensation upon their return.

"He [acting secretary] also promised that all the 80 workers who staged a hunger strike on the High Commission premises in Kuala Lumpur will be sent home by October 5. But until now only 13 have returned," said Shahidul Islam, a returnee worker.

Criminal killed

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adding that Mohammadpur police later took the wounded to a local hospital where doctors declared him dead.

Police and locals confirmed the identity of the dead as Manik, son of Hossain Ali who is now in jail in a narcotics-related case.

Rab recovered a foreign revolver loaded with one bullet from the spot.

Better relations

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adviser said, adding that Dhaka will try to locate sources for meeting emergency food requirements, including nuclear power for peaceful purposes.

Ifekhar also said Dhaka should look to utilising the country's rich intellectual and cultural resources to advance the foreign policy interests.

Earlier, delivering a speech at the conference of Islamic foreign ministers, Ifekhar said, "We must strengthen cooperation among member states to prevent conflicts, achieve an independent Palestine, safeguard the rights of the Muslims where they are minority, and prevent unilateral actions against Muslim states."

He said the Islamic world must use its "abundant resources" to achieve higher levels of development in the fields of economy and science. He urged the OIC to pay special attention to the least developed Muslim countries.

The foreign adviser said the West mistakenly equates Islam with terrorism, but "Islam is a faith of peace and the Islamic world is united against terrorism".

AL for lifting

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political leaders and workers could get involved in the voter listing process.

Their stance on the lifting of the emergency came as Chief Election Commissioner ATN Shamsul Huda Tuesday suggested that emergency should be withdrawn from places at least two months before local-body polls in a bid to help the candidates conduct campaigns.

The meeting, which was held at the AL's acting President Zillur Rahman's Gulshan residence, also agreed in principle to fully cooperate with the Election Commission (EC) in implementing its electoral roadmap.

The meeting is part of a series of talks among the AL's allies that aim at thrashing out a common position on reforms issues at the dialogue with the EC.

The AL and the SD leaders agreed in principle that the alliance's 31-point reform proposal would be at the core of their conversation with the electoral body.

They pointed out that both the government and the EC would have to play a responsible role in implementing the roadmap.

The two parties decided that they will make out a strong to the EC in a bid to have war criminals, patrons of religious extremism and communal forces disqualified from contesting the elections and religion-based political parties outlawed.

AL leaders Zillur Rahman, Tofail Ahmed, Motia Chowdhury, Mukul Bose, Mahmudur Rahman Manna, Akhteruzzaman, Sultan

Mohammad Mansur Ahmed, Rahmat Ali, Abdul Mannan Khan, Abdul Latif Siddiqui, Dr Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin, Habibur Rahman Siraj, Dr Abdur Razzak, Dr Dipu Moni and Maj Gen (retd) Subid Ali Bhuiyan were present at the meeting on behalf of the AL.

Dilip Barua, Abu Hamed Shahabuddin, Lutfur Rahman, Harun Chowdhury, Dhiren Singha, Abul Khayer and Biren Shah, among others, represented the SD.

The 14-party coordinator Tofail Ahmed later told reporters that they want to cooperate with the EC in implementing its roadmap but the government and the commission should not take any decision or make comments which may put obstacle to implementing the process.

He said they want an election free from black money, muscle power, criminal activities, extremists and communal activities and urged the EC to take initiatives to that end.

The AL leader also demanded that the EC simplify the rules for registering the political parties as many parties otherwise would not be able to get registered.

Tofail said they do not support any bid of the Election Commission to control political parties in the name of registering them.

The SD's General Secretary Dilip Barua said the EC should take measures so that religion-based political parties cannot participate in the elections as, he said, these parties divide the nation.

Truth Commission

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country's economy, he said, adding, "If we cannot create employment for poor ordinary people, cannot create jobs, the government will fail to function."

Plea bargain will not only reduce the time for disposal of a case, it will also reduce government expenditure required for keeping the accused in prisons and prosecution of the cases, the information adviser said.

"The country will face a big problem if the businessmen stop their businesses and the economy stops functioning. It is not possible to create businessmen overnight," he said, adding that the government is just going to deal businessmen in a separate way, which does not mean sparing them of the corruption charges against them.

"During the rule of law, 'court', 'trial' - these are regular issues. But when businessmen had to run business amidst a reign of corruption, many might have been involved in corruption against their will," Mainul said.

If the state machinery, the ministers, political leaders and government employees are honest, businessmen cannot get the chance to

CG can

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arrange a free, fair and credible election and then hand over the power," he said adding only an elected government can enact necessary laws.

Demanding the withdrawal of state of emergency, Delwar said emergency should be lifted for an independent, fair and a spontaneous election.

He also urged the government to act neutrally and hoped that the government will recognise their right to the party office.

Responding to a query, he said he believed that no religion-based fundamentalist political party exists in the country.

Meanwhile, stressing on party unity, expelled secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday said the party has no alternative but to participate in the next election.

"We want to implement the reforms, but keeping the party united," he said while talking to reporters at his Gulshan residence. He also urged all not to do or say anything that might hurt the unity of the BNP.

Bhuiyan, however, rejected his expulsion order made by the party chairperson, saying that most central leaders and former MPs of BNP are in agreement with him on the issue.

On the 14-party alliance's demand of banning religion-based political parties, Bhuiyan said the EC is not authorised to ban anyone except terrorists and militants.

Maj (retd) Hafiz Uddin Ahmed, Maj Mofazzal Karim, Nazir Hossain and Masud Arun were present among others at Bhuiyan's residence.

Flood losses

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Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The contribution would include both loans and grants.

After meeting Aziz, Senga told reporters that the ADB's contribution would depend on an ongoing flood damage and needs assessment study.

"Initially, we weren't expected to come in to help this year....we hoped the problem was not so severe. But the finance adviser in his recent trip to Manila indicated the importance of extending support to the flood victims in the country," he said.

"So we quickly managed to form a team in full cooperation with other development partners to formulate our assistance," Senga said adding, "Hopefully we will be able to provide substantive assistance for rehabilitation."

The WB director general said that he and Aziz also discussed about ongoing regional cooperation on an information superhighway project.

"Essentially this is about information communication technology," he said, adding, "If Bangladesh and its neighbours get together there will be a multiplier effect of having joint access to information and this will be very helpful for Bangladesh."

They would finalise the technical scope of the project soon, Senga added.

Khaleda

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sourced told the news agency.

According to our staff correspondent, the lawyers for Khaleda yesterday submitted a petition to Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court seeking permission to furnish a bail bond after the bail order granted by the High Court to the former prime minister rejected the court.

The HC granted bail to Khaleda on September 30 in the case filed by the ACC for awarding container-handling work at Chattogram Port and Dhaka Inland Container Yard to Gato, violating tender rules.

The lawyers could not furnish the bail bond yesterday, as the judge concerned was not available.

Meanwhile, detained former state minister for energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain was questioned yesterday at the jail gate regarding the container handling case.

Competent sources said a team comprising Anti-Corruption Commission Deputy Director Jahirul Huda and Taskforce-23 Officer Major Mostafa Kamal questioned him for about an hour in the afternoon at Dhaka Central Jailgate.

Detained former health minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, who is now in Dhaka Jail, was scheduled to be questioned in connection with the case. He could not be questioned because of time constraint. The former minister will be questioned within a day or two.

Both the ministers were the members of the purchase committee that approved the awarding of a contract to Gato, a private company.

The Anti-Corruption Commission has already questioned former five ministers, six retired secretaries and one serving additional secretary of the communications ministry in connection with the case.

HC stays

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The rule is made returnable in six weeks," said the court order.

On September 5, ACC Assistant Commissioner Mahbubul Alam filed the case with Motiheel Police Station on charge of taking out a loan of over Tk 158.67 crore from IFIC Bank of the name of Beximco Group through forgery.

The other accused in the case are Salman's brother and Chairman of Beximco Group Sohail Fatahman, former managing director of IFIC Bank Ataul Haque, ex-manager of IFIC Bank's Motiheel branch Asad-ud-Doula and directors of Beximco Holdings Ltd Iqbal Ahmed and MA Qasem.

Soldiers hunt

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Villarsosa said embassy staff had gone to some monasteries in recent days and found them completely empty. Others were barricaded by the military and declared off-limits to outsiders.

"There is a significantly reduced number of monks on the streets. Where are the monks? What has happened to them?" she said. The Democratic Voice of Burma, a dissident radio station based in Norway, said authorities have released 90 of 400 monks detained in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin state, during a mid-night raid on monasteries on Sept. 25.

A semblance of normality returned to Yangon after daybreak, with some shops opening and light traffic on roads.

However, "people are terrified, and the underlying forces of discontent have not been addressed," Villarsosa said. "People have been unhappy for a long time... Since the events of last week, there's now the unhappiness combined with anger and fear."

Some people remained hopeful that democracy would come.

"I don't believe the protests have been totally crushed," said Kin, a 29-year-old language teacher in Yangon, whose father and brother had joined a 1988 pro-democracy movement that ended in a crackdown in which at least 3,000 people were killed.

"There is hope, but we fear to hope," she said. "We still dream of rearing our children in a country where everybody would have equal chances and opportunities."

The military has ruled Myanmar since 1962, and the current junta came to power after snuffing out the 1988 pro-democracy movement. The generals called elections in 1990 but

refused to give up power when Suu Kyi's party won.

The military crushed the protests on Sept. 26 and 27 with live ammunition, tear gas and beatings. Hundreds of monks and civilians were carted off to detention camps. The government says 10 people were killed in the violence. But dissident groups put the death toll at up to 200 and say 6,000 people were detained.

Gambari went to Myanmar on Saturday to convey the international community's outrage at the junta's actions. He also hoped to persuade the junta to take the people's aspirations seriously.

He met junta leader Senior Gen. Than Shwe and his deputies and talked to detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi twice.

Gambari avoided the media in Singapore, where he arrived Tuesday night en route to New York. He was not expected to issue any statement before briefing UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Friday.

The junta has not commented on Gambari's visit and the United Nations has only released photos of Gambari and a somber, haggard-looking Suu Kyi who has spent nearly 12 of the last 18 years under house arrest shaking hands during their meeting in a state guest house in Yangon.

In Singapore, Gambari met with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, the chairman of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations bloc of which Myanmar is a member.

A Singapore government statement said Lee told Gambari that Asean "is fully behind his mission" to bring about "a political solution for national reconciliation and a peaceful transition to democracy."

Power-sharing talks

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would drop a raft of corruption charges against Benazir, thus meeting one of her key conditions for a pact ahead of her return.

Benazir, though, dismissed the amnesty offer. "It's absolutely wrong, the news the corruption charges have been dropped," she said, adding, "It's a disinformation campaign run by...the head of the intelligence bureau."

The alleged amnesty was part of a wider disinformation campaign designed "to cause controversy and confusion...to distract from the real issues" which were free elections, restoring the rule of law and reviving the economy, she said.

"The PPP wants to see change. We want to see movement towards democracy... movement to a level playing field," she added.

PPP vice-chairman Makhdoom Amin Fahim, one of only two candidates running against Musharraf in weekend elections, meanwhile reiterated that the PPP cannot support Musharraf as president if he continues as army chief.

"We cannot support a general in the presidential elections. He should shed his uniform and we cannot support him in this presidential election while he is in uniform," he said.

If a power-sharing deal could be struck, it would allow Musharraf to remain as president while ushering in civil rule eight years after he seized power in a coup.

He has promised to quit the position as head of the nuclear-armed military and become a civilian leader if, as expected, he wins Saturday's vote.

Earlier Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf waited Wednesday for former prime minister Benazir's response to an amnesty offer that could pave the way for a power-sharing deal days before he seeks re-election.

As Benazir's party prepared to meet to discuss the offer, Musharraf faced a final legal hurdle to his attempt to win another five-year term in Saturday's presidential vote.

The Supreme Court was hearing last-minute challenges filed by his election rivals, who are seeking to block his candidacy on the grounds that he is not eligible to stand.

But the key focus Wednesday was on the political negotiations that may, if successful, allow Musharraf to remain as president while ushering in civilian rule.

Benazir's party, which is the largest in the opposition, kept its members in parliament.

The United States has pressed for a Bhutto-Musharraf accord on the grounds that they are both liberals who would be natural allies in the fight against al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

In a reminder of the unrest, two Pakistani soldiers were killed in a rebel attack early Wednesday in the tribal belt between North West Frontier Province and Afghanistan.

N Korea agrees

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As part of the second phase, North Korea will disable its five-megawatt plutonium producing reactor and two other key facilities at Yongbyon by December 31.

Those facilities were described by Bush as the "core" of North Korea's nuclear weapons programme, according to a US government statement released in Washington.

The Yongbyon facilities, as well as two other minor ones, were shut down in July as part of the first phase of the February accord.

"At the request of the other parties, the United States will lead disarmament activities," Wednesday's statement said, adding that US experts would lead a team to the North within two weeks to begin preparations.

North Korea also agreed to provide a "complete and correct declaration of all its nuclear programmes" by December 31, according to Wednesday's statement.

The reclusive North has spent decades developing its nuclear programmes and no-one outside the country knows for sure how much atomic material it has produced, or whether there are any other facilities it has yet to declare.

While Yongbyon produced plutonium, the United States had previously accused the North of also running a secret programme to develop highly enriched uranium.

Both highly enriched uranium and plutonium can be used to make nuclear weapons. However there was no mention of uranium in Wednesday's statement.

In return for pushing ahead with disarmament, the five other parties to the talks will provide North Korea with another 900,000 tonnes of heavy fuel oil or its equivalent in aid, the pact said.

The impoverished nation has already received 100,000 tonnes from South Korea and China after it shut down Yongbyon and allowed inspectors from the UN's atomic watchdog back into the country.

Bush last week gave the go-ahead to deliver another tranche of 50,000 tonnes.

Wednesday's statement said the United States agreed to work to improve bilateral relations with North Korea, "moving towards a full diplomatic relationship."

Washington also committed to work towards removing the North from its list of state sponsors of terrorism, but only if Pyongyang continued pushing ahead with disarmament, the agreement said.

Pyeongyang was tasked with improving its troubled relations with Japan and resolving issues left over from an "unfortunate past" -- an apparent reference to Japan's wartime occupation of the Korean peninsula and the kidnapping of Japanese nationals by Pyongyang.

The agreement came after the chief envoys from the six nations held four days of talks in Beijing that ended on Sunday. Russia is the final member of the forum.

They said then that the deal had been brokered but the statement was not released until the governments of all six nations had approved it.

The six-party talks, which began in 2003, failed to stop North Korea from conducting its first test of an atomic bomb in October last year.

But negotiations continued and finally resulted in the February accord that has become the blueprint for disarmament.

The third and final disarmament phase to be implemented in early 2008 would require North Korea to surrender all its fissile material and nuclear weapons, which experts see as an ambitious task.

Kibria murder

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are now cross-checking a list of possible suspects belonging to Islamist outfit Harkatul Jihad Al Islami (Huji). A number of detained Huji leaders in their statements had disclosed several names of Huji members, who they claimed to have been involved in the murder of Kibria and four others, the officials added.

The supplementary investigation of the Kibria assassination case was started by the government in March this year as the slain leader's family appealed to the chief adviser on January 19 this year to conduct a fresh and fair probe into the case.

On January 27, 2005, Shah AMS Kibria -- a noted economist, finance minister from 1996 to 2001 during the term of Awami League (AL) government, parliamentarian (Habiganj 3) and a veteran AL leader -- was killed along with four AL activists in a grenade attack on an AL rally at Boidder Bazar in Habiganj.

The High Court stayed the proceedings of the sensational case on May 14, 2006 following a petition by the complainant of the case, advocate Majid Khan, also a local AL leader.

Following the murder, advocate Majid Khan, on behalf of the Kibria family, filed two cases -- one for the murder and the other under explosives act.

In less than two months into the murder, on March 20, 2005, Munshi Atiqur Rahman, senior ASP of CID and then investigation officer, (IO) of the cases, submitted charge sheets of