

BNP, AL helped each

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taken any action against the leaders now detained in jails, no one would have imagined their present state," said Moeen, vowing that no one who has resorted to corruption will be spared.

He said the ongoing anti-corruption drive was not aimed at any certain group or political party, but the whole initiatives have been taken in the interest of the country and thenation.

The army chief explained to the Bangladeshis expatriates the present situation of the country, the role of the caretaker government and the armed forces, drafting of the voter roll and national identity card, and electoral roadmap. He urged all to be united as Bangladeshis under "one flag, one country and one spirit of nation".

Moeen said the main goal of the present government is to free the country of corruption as early as possible as it destroyed the country's democracy.

Bangladesh Ambassador to the United States M Humayun Kabir delivered the welcome speech at the gathering while president of Probashi Nagorik Committee Mahabadi Sarkar greeted the army chief.

Earlier, the Bangladesh ambassador welcomed Moeen who arrived at the John F Kennedy International Airport from London.

"Many people pose questions, including 'Where are the leaders in Bangladesh? Under whose leadership will the country run?' I say there are leaders who are honest and accountable to the nation. They must be brought to the fore. I do not think that there is leadership crisis in the country," Moeen told the gathering.

He said there is no controversy about Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and late president Ziaur Rahman. They are our national heroes. It has already been decided that textbooks will have articles on the national heroes, he added.

The army chief said all know about the state of the country before January 11. The world was surprised to see the happenings in Bangladesh on October 28. "We had never seen even killing of a beast in a way human beings were killed on the streets," he said, adding that although a caretaker government was there at that time, it had rather intensified the

problems.

Law and order situation broke down and none was caring about the law, said Moeen, adding that political killings were normal at that time. The law and order was restored as soon as the present caretaker government assumed office, he said.

He said the country witnessed 34 political killings on an average each month, which has now come to zero.

The army chief said the country had three options: to go for the January 22 elections, to proclaim martial law, and to protect the national existence through establishment of an acceptable caretaker government by quickly promulgating the state of emergency.

Moeen said the world and the people of Bangladesh thought martial law was imminent. "But we decided not to follow the footsteps of our predecessors and adopted the third option," he said.

He said there was a plan to destroy the country's garment industries in 2006, but they failed successfully.

The Chittagong port became inoperative but was made fully operational after some troublemakers were arrested, said Moeen, adding that the current efficiency of the port has increased by 40 percent while the cost has reduced by 30 percent.

The army chief said setting up of an effective Election Commission (EC) and an independent Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and Public Service Commission (PSC) is the major success of the present caretaker government.

Describing the now-defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption as a centre of corruption itself, Moeen said the ACC has been doing an excellent job in checking corruption. He said the ACC has filed hundreds of corruption cases and 24 persons have so far been convicted.

The EC is preparing the voter identity cards—one of the first steps towards development in modern Bangladesh—with the help of the army. Moeen said already 25 lakh voter ID cards have been prepared.

He said the task of voters' registration will start in full swing from November and will end by July next year. A total of nine crore people will be given voter ID cards and no one will be able to raise questions about its acceptability and transparency since restoring democracy is the biggest challenge at present.

Oli finds no reason

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political party could offer proposals to his party, which is not new in political culture. "If any proposal comes, we will decide on it after a thorough examination and consultation in our party presidium and the executive committee," he said.

During the hour-long interview, Col Oli spoke candidly about party reforms, ban on politics and lifting of the state of emergency, expatriate voters and anti-corruption drive in the interim period.

Asked about Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan's moves for reforms in BNP, he recounted that the LGRD Ministry headed by Bhuiyan, as its minister, was dubbed the most corrupt ministry during the five-year rule of the BNP government.

"A question lurk in people's minds as to how a ministry could be so corrupt if its minister was not corrupt," he said, trying to underpin his observations about his former party colleague.

Oli observed that Bhuiyan, expelled from BNP, had been BNP secretary general for the longest time, nearly 12 years, and was the hardcore supporter of BNP chief Khaleda Zia.

He said, "The Prime Minister's Office, Hawa Bhabna and BNP office were controlled by Bhuiyan cohorts."

"When we spoke against corruption and terrorism in the last four years, Bhuiyan and his colleagues kept mum, being blinded by power and being busy enjoying bread and butter," he said.

Carrying on his tirade against the immediate-past ruling party affairs, Oli said, "Once Bhuiyan faithfully carried out Khaleda Zia's instructions. Now suddenly he became revolutionary. Such an opportunist leader who can betray his party cannot be trusted."

The LDP leader said most corrupt persons are facing trial and punishment, but he reminded that a few corrupt ones are trying to hide by giving lip service to reforms. "I do not call them reformists, they are opportunists. The government must take action against them."

Oli believes that if the Anti-corruption Commission is allowed to function freely, the level of corruption in the country would come down to the lowest level in next two to three years.

Asked about Bikalpa Dhara President Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury's proposition on national consensus government, he said a party that would secure majority seats through next parliamentary elections should decide how the country would be ruled.

"It does not depend on any one's wish to fulfil one's personal ambition," he said, taking a swipe at his another former party colleague.

Oli, however, noted that it would be good for the country if there were consensus on important

national issues.

Asked his opinion about reconciliation between the government and major parties, as being seen in the political scene of Pakistan, the LDP leader said there is a gulf of difference between Bangladesh and Pakistan politics.

He said Pakistan witnessed corruption but Bangladesh witnessed plunder. "Under any circumstance the corrupt cannot be pardoned, and the people will not accept it as well."

Oli noted that people would not like to see any revenge on any individual out of suspicion. Every act should be done with transparency and accountability and due process must be followed.

Replying to a question, he said the ban on political activities and the state of emergency should be relaxed by December for restoration of healthy politics, as he said "controlled democracy cannot bring good for the country".

He said, "I feel minimum 12 months will be required for political parties for election preparations."

Criticising the Election Commission's (EC) move to register Bangladeshis expatriates in the UK as voters, he asked why the EC did not think of the other 20 lakh working in middle-east countries. He said making the expatriates of one country voters and depriving 70 percent others living in other countries would be contrary to the existing laws.

As a matter of fact, he said, 60 percent development works in the country are done with the remittances sent by these people.

Oli said instead of giving voter ID cards to the expatriates, their passports could be recognised as ID cards. This will reduce the cost of the EC and reduce the burden of frequent foreign trips by EC officials.

Asked about the government's new strategy to punish corrupt businessmen instead of throwing them into jail, Oli said the way the law is being applied against corrupt politicians should not be applied against corrupt businessmen for the sake of the national economy.

"But it must be looked into whether the businessmen are siphoning off money, depriving the government of taxes and their money is invested in the country."

President

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General Assembly. The army chief will meet UN officials and visit family there while Mirza Aziz is in Washington for the annual general meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Principal Staff Officer of Armed Forces Division Lt Gen Masududdin Chowdhury is also set to leave for the US on October 22.

Moeen said the PSC was a place of corruption for recruiting government officials. But now it is free of corruption.

Referring to hundreds of crores of smuggled money, the army chief said procedures to bring back the money is going on expeditiously. "Already \$129 million have been brought back to the country and another \$72 million is in the pipeline for reimbursement while the process to recover another \$240 million is going on," said Moeen.

Replying to a query, he said the EC is considering banning activities of the political parties abroad and has already notified the parties in this regard.

Moeen said the country will not go back to the pre-January 11 situations. He said the decision to establish an independent human rights commission has already been taken and the National Security Council will be formed if required.

Asked why leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami have not been arrested, Moeen said the government does not have any discriminatory attitude regarding corruption suspects.

"Out of the 222 suspected corrupt, there are some Jamaat leaders too. So, it is not right that Jamaat leaders have been spared," the army chief said, adding that they have no plan to publish more lists of corruption suspects.

During his visit to the US, Moeen will call on the president of the United Nations General Assembly and Congressman Joseph A Crowley and exchange views with the journalists and Bangladeshis expatriates in Florida. He will also present a paper at a seminar at the John F Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Kumari Puja

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Narayanangi, Barisal, Sylhet, Habiganj, Dinajpur and other parts in the country.

Thousands of Hindu devotees will throng the Dhaka Ramakrishna Mission where the Puja will start at 11:00 am worshipping a six-year-old girl as the image of the goddess.

A girl aged between six and 12, who symbolises the virgin form of the goddess, is worshipped in front of the idol of Durga.

Kumari Puja is held either on Mahashanti or Mahanabami. This year, it will be celebrated on Mahashanti.

According to Hindu scriptures, Kumari Puja commemorates the killing of Kolasur by goddess Mahakali. Kolasur had occupied the heaven and the earth. When the helpless deities approached Mahakali for help, she was born again in the form of maiden Durga and killed Kolasur.

Devotional songs, dance and aratika will be performed at different Puja Mandaps. Besides, Sandhi Puja will be celebrated from 8:57 pm to 9:45 pm across the country.

Meanwhile, leaders of different political, social and cultural organisations, civil society members, diplomats and top officials yesterday visited Puja Mandaps at Dhakeswari temple, Jagannath Hall temple, Ramkrishna Mission, Kalabagan Puja Mandap, Tantibazar, Shankhari Bazar and Banglabazar to greet the Hindu devotees.

Awami League (AL) leaders led by Matia Chowdhury distributed clothes among poor people, said Shree Shree Ramshita Mandir Committee in a press release yesterday.

Charges framed

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Rahman, Omar Faruq, Kamruzzaman, Mir Hossain, Yeasin, Tofajjal, Abul Hasan, Masudur Rahman, Nizam Uddin, Jamanur, Ibarhim, Shafayet Hossain, Jamal Uddin, Ibrahim, Mahmudul, Mohibullah, Aman Ullah, Kawsar and Masud.

Salah Uddin is also an accused in a case filed in connection with the blasts in four cinemas in Mymensingh.

The JMB men were accused in the cases filed with Sadar, Muktagacha and Bhaluka police stations in Mymensingh between 2006 and 2007. The court fixed November 4 and November 5 for producing the accused before the court.

NBR gets

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who took the helm of NBR on January 21.

Badiur was transferred as secretary to the food and disaster management ministry, said an establishment ministry circular yesterday. The DMP commissioner said motorised vehicles would be allowed to make U-turns at traffic stops (during red) so that plying of vehicles is smooth and jams are avoided.

He said in order to make city dwellers stick to the traffic rules, the DMP has adopted stricter initiatives so that no law breaker gets away. The DMP will be stricter in enforcing the traffic rules.

The DMP would take punitive actions against owners and drivers of 20 to 25-year-old buses and mini-buses that are harmful to the environment.

On Wednesday, high-ranking officials of the police and traffic police attended a meeting in this regard at the DMP Headquarters. The DMP commissioner chaired the meeting that made the decisions.

EC pours cold water

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two factions over having the invitation. With Chairperson Khaleda Zia behind bars, both the groups have been reluctant in their efforts to convince the commission that they are the real BNP and thus should have a berth in the electoral dialogue.

They believed getting invited would amount to being recognised as the mainstream BNP, said sources close to the opposing camps.

Besides, the one receiving the invitation would be in a better position to register with the commission as the BNP. The other would have to take a new name and meet certain criteria set by the EC for registration. According to draft proposals by the commission, a political party must register with it to contest the next parliamentary election.

The proposals say a party lacking representation in any of the previous parliaments must have committees in at least 32 districts with 1,000 members each. Besides, it must have a 200-member committee at all upazilas of those districts.

Meanwhile, a senior leader of the pro-reform group yesterday told The Daily Star that a move is on to settle intra-party discord to keep the BNP united. He said, "We hope we will unite even before the talks with the commission begin."

Asked if the expulsion orders would be withdrawn to reinstate Bhuiyan as the secretary general, the leader wishing anonymity said they still believe the party chairperson should take back the expulsion orders to avert any potential split ahead of the next general election.

Mannan Bhuiyan on June 25 unveiled a 15-point reform proposal including the one aiming to

dislodge Khaleda Zia from the chairperson's post. The proposals led to a deep crack in the organisation with the pro-Bhuiyan leaders going all-out to mobilise support in favour of a council by August-September to carry out the reforms.

A day before her detention on September 3, Khaleda Zia expelled Bhuiyan and joint secretary general Ashraf Hossain for involvement in activities against the party. The same day she appointed Delwar as the new secretary general.

The BNP on September 5 sent a letter to the EC, informing it about the latest changes in the party lineup. It also said the commission should contact the new secretary general for any official purpose.

On the other hand, some senior leaders of the faction led by Bhuiyan in a letter to the CEC on September 9 labelled Khaleda Zia's decision to expel Bhuiyan and Ashraf as a violation of the government restrictions on political activities.

By the same token, they questioned Delwar's appointment as the secretary general.

A high-level delegation went to the commission to hand in the letter. At an hour-long meeting they tried to make the election commissioners believe that Bhuiyan-led faction represents the mainstream BNP and deserves an invitation to the electoral talks.

Against this backdrop, the EC had begun examining the electoral laws and the BNP constitution to decide who among Bhuiyan and Delwar fronts the BNP mainline in absence of its chairperson.

It found that the BNP's constitution empowers the chairperson to take any punitive actions against leaders and workers for breach of discipline and order, said sources at the EC Secretariat.

Benazir returns

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alot over the last 20 years but we are still fighting a dictatorship," Bhutto, the first woman ever to lead an Islamic nation, told AFP when asked to compare with her last homecoming in 1986.

"We want to isolate extremists and build a better Pakistan," she said.

Bhutto fled Pakistan in 1999 to avoid corruption charges arising from her two previous terms in power but they were quashed by key US ally Musharraf earlier this month.

Dressed in a traditional green tunic, white trousers and headscarf that matched the Pakistani flag, Bhutto cried as she paused on the last step from the aircraft before finally planting her foot on her home soil.

She later embarked on a procession atop a specially modified lorry equipped with bullet-proof screens, waving to flag-waving supporters from her Pakistan People's Party as they chanted "Long live Bhutto".

More than 20,000 police and troops, backed up by bomb squads with sniffer dogs, patrolled the route from Karachi airport to the imposing mausoleum of Pakistan's founding father.

Her party has also formed a 5,000-strong private army tasked with protecting her. "I love Benazir and we are here to safeguard her life. I can sacrifice my life for her," said one of her guards, Abdul Majid Mirani.

Bhutto, who has repeatedly angered Muslim hardliners with harsh criticism of Islamic extremists, earlier shrugged off police warnings she would be targeted for assassination by al-Qaeda or Taliban militants.

"I don't want to think of the risk," the two-time prime minister, whose brother was shot dead in Karachi in 1996 and whose father was hanged in 1979 by military dictator Zia-ul-Haq, said before the plane took off from Dubai.

Pakistani police said more than 250,000 people had jammed the streets awaiting her return. Her loyalists put the teeming crowd, many of whom were dancing to a frenzy of pounding drums, at more than one million.

Ban on rickshaws

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Paltan, Bangabhaban, Tikatuli, Sayedabad, Shanir Akhra areas in order to help motorised vehicles get out of Dhaka city quickly. The commissioner expected that traffic jams would reduce this way.

The DMP commissioner said motorised vehicles would be allowed to make U-turns at traffic stops (during red) so that plying of vehicles is smooth and jams are avoided.

He said in order to make city dwellers stick to the traffic rules, the DMP has adopted stricter initiatives so that no law breaker gets away. The DMP will be stricter in enforcing the traffic rules.

The DMP would take punitive actions against owners and drivers of 20 to 25-year-old buses and mini-buses that are harmful to the environment.

On Wednesday, high-ranking officials of the police and traffic police attended a meeting in this regard at the DMP Headquarters. The DMP commissioner chaired the meeting that made the decisions.

Harkatul link

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Hannan into remand, he added.

Hannan is in Sylhet jail at present.

On Wednesday, Inspector General of Police Nur Mohammad told the reporters that the charge sheet of the case is almost finalised and it would be submitted soon.

The hearing on the remand prayer for Hannan that CID has already placed to a Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka will be held on next Tuesday.

Due to political meddling, investigation into the deadly grenade attack that killed 24 and maimed over 300 others made no headway during the four-party alliance government.

The case is also a glaring example of how the government top tiers can manage to manipulate criminal investigations to meet their own political ends.

The government's stance influenced the then investigators of the case enough to weave a story, involving Mokhesur Rahman, a ward level AL leader and also a former ward commissioner of Maghbar area in the capital.

They attempted to feed the public the woven story through an ostensible confessional statement made by a petty criminal Joj Miah, in which he had named Mokhesur as one of the plotters of the attack.

Joj Miah's weak statement drew media criticisms, finally making it appear as blatantly merited, and he himself turned out to be a creation of the police department's well practised imaginations, when his sister divulged to the media soon after his arrest that CID had been paying Joj Miah's family Tk 2,500 a month for upkeep since the arrest.

Based on the statements, of Joj Miah and two others, all of whom had made almost identical confessions, the CID investigators even attempted to submit a charge sheet in the case, but the government held back following a media flak that had termed Joj Miah's story very sketchy.

CID officials said the authenticity of the confessional statement made by Joj Miah is questionable as no other corroborative evidence was found.

Apart from Joj Miah, Abul Hashem alias Rana and Shafiqul Islam gave confessional statements.

Khaleda Case

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investigation officer.

Failing to obtain the addresses of three former PMO officials, including principal secretary Kamal Uddin Siddiqui, for quizzing, Huda wrote a letter on Wednesday to the establishment ministry seeking its cooperation in this regard.

The whereabouts of Siddiqui, who disappeared after the January changeover, is yet to be known.

Regarding the case, the ACC has so far questioned a number of individuals, including the accused former prime minister Khaleda, seven former ministers, six retired secretaries and one serving additional secretary of the communications ministry.

On September 2, ACC Deputy Director Golam Shahriar Chowdhury filed the case against BNP Chairperson and former prime minister Khaleda Zia, her younger son Arafat Rahman Koko and 11 others for alleged underhand dealings in awarding the container-handling contract to Gatco.

Govt not yet

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discussion in the advisory council," Communications Adviser Maj Gen (ret'd) MA Matin told a private television channel yesterday.

Talking to journalists, Local Government and Rural Development Adviser Anwarul Iqbal said, "I came to know the matter from newspaper reports. I have no such information."

On the issue, Law Adviser Mainul Hossain told a private television channel, "We have to sit [to discuss it]."

The law adviser observed that people's trust on the conscience and intellect of the judges has been recognised through separation of the judiciary from the executive, a constitutional obligation lying pending since independence of Bangladesh.

This independence would also enhance the dignity of the judges, he said, adding "From now on you please deliver justice to the people independently without looking at others."

Mainul also said democracy becomes meaningless without justice and similarly honesty and independent outlook of a judge ensures justice. "It is your privilege, but the task is very tough. You will remain responsible to your conscience while discharging your responsibilities," he observed.

As the government is accountable to the people for its deeds, the judiciary, one of the organs of the state, is also accountable to the people, the law adviser added.

Dhaka to ask Delhi

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already on to bring back criminals from India...Now the issue is coming up at a multilateral level," LGRD Adviser Anwarul Iqbal told reporters yesterday while replying to a query on bringing back 600-700 criminals learnt to be hiding in India.

Once the Saarc member countries reach a consensus on multilateral legal assistance (MLA), they can utilise it as an instrument to cooperate on crimes without relying solely on bilateral settlements.

On extradition of Bangladeshis criminals hiding in India, the LGRD adviser said, "Everything regarding criminal matters will be covered by the mutual legal assistance."

Iqbal, who was talking to reporters after an inter-ministerial preparatory meeting for the upcoming New Delhi meet, will lead a nine-member Bangladesh delegation there.

The Indian government for the first time handed over three Bangladeshis criminals to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) on October 7. The CID officials are hopeful about bringing back two top criminals—Tanvirul Islam Joy and Harris Ahmed alias Hares—from Kolkata next week.

Asked by Indian police, the CID yesterday sent detail information including criminal records and photographs of 10 criminals hiding in the neighbouring country.

Apart from Joy and Harris who were arrested in May, on the list are Subrata Bain, Iisan, Dakat Shahid, Mollah Masud, Emon, Shahadat and Khorsheed, said a CID official.

Police chiefs of the Saarc countries will meet on October 23, the home secretaries the next day and the home ministers will give a final shape to the deliberations on October 25. They will have a round-up meeting on October 26.

The Bangladesh delegation also includes the home secretary, inspector general of police and deputy secretary (political).

Sources said India is strongly pushing the MLA issue, raised it at bilateral meetings and then at multilateral level.

Under the proposed assistance, Saarc member states will extend legal cooperation among themselves in dealing with arresting

criminals and checking drug-smuggling and women trafficking.

"Saarc legal experts have already met in Colombo and we will discuss the outcome of that meeting," Iqbal said.

The Saarc member states have already agreed in principle to form a police forum—Saarcpol, and will make deliberations to give it a concrete shape at the upcoming meeting.

Nepal first proposed the formation of the Saarcpol, designed like Interpol and Europol, last year for cooperation in police matters in the region.

"We still need to examine it and study the details," said Iqbal.

Our New Delhi correspondent reports: Ahead of the Saarc conference, a meeting of India-Pakistan Joint Anti-Terror Mechanism will be held in New Delhi on October 22. The mechanism was set up following an understanding between Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf on the sideline of NAM summit in Havana, Cuba in September last year.

Talking on three Bangladeshis criminals deported on October 7, Indian Inspector General of Police (CID Operations) Rajiv Kumar said they were picked up from a south Kolkata locality on March 17 on charges of entering India on forged passports.

While Salim's deportation was ordered by the Kolkata High Court, the deportation of both Habibur and Sohail was issued by the Indian government's Foreigners and Non-Resident Indians Department, he said.

At the regional level, senior Saarc police officials had met in Hyderabad earlier this month and prior to that finance secretaries of the Saarc countries met in Delhi in September with focus on ways to curb trans-border crimes, drug smuggling and terror funding.

The Hyderabad meeting agreed to appoint a police official from a member country to act as the nodal officer to coordinate with other countries of the region exchanging information on police matters.

The first meeting of Saarc home ministers was held in Dhaka in May last year.

Export dips 21pc

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positive from September and from October and onward, we will see a very good export growth," he added. "At the end of the day, there is nothing to be worried."

The BKMEA president explained that the downturn in exports in July this year was caused mainly by a few orders received between December and March last year - when the country witnessed political instability followed by massive labour unrests. This situation scared off the buyers and made them reluctant in giving work orders to Bangladeshis suppliers.

Another reason the foreign buyers did not place orders with Bangladeshi manufacturers at that time was the unusually warm winter season in the west, especially in European countries, he added.

Echoing him, Anwarul Alam Chowdhury Parvez, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), told The Daily Star that the manufacturers are now receiving more export orders after overcoming a dull period.

"From November, RMG export will witness a positive