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Maj Gen (retd) Ibrahim floats political party

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Maj Gen (retd) Syed Mohammad Ibrahim yesterday launched a political party named Bangladesh Welfare Party, declaring himself as its chairman for three years, and urged people to join the party to bring a change in politics.

The party's draft constitution vests in the chairman absolute power to control, supervise and coordinate all activities of the organisation and its national council, advisory council, central executive committee.

The national council of the new party will be held within 18 months to elect party chairman.

But Ibrahim will continue in his post for three years, says the draft constitution prepared by the founder-chairman of the party, the

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Like Iraq, US intel on Iran faulty

US report admits Iran halted N-quest in 2003; Tehran hails report as blow for Bush

AFP/AP, Washington

First Iraq, now Iran. The United States has operated under a cloud of faulty intelligence in both countries.

In a bombshell intelligence assessment, the United States has backed away from its once-inclined assertion that Tehran is intent on building nuclear bombs.

The US intelligence community said in a new report Monday that Iran halted its nuclear weapons programme in 2003, and that US

charges about Tehran's atomic goals have been overblown for at least two years.

At the same time, the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) by all 16 US spy agencies cautioned that the Islamic republic was keeping its options open and could be able to make a nuclear weapon sometime between 2010 and 2015.

The NIE, which represents the consensus among all 16 US spy agencies, said the programme was still dormant, and Iran's intentions unclear, but that the halt suggested

Tehran was more susceptible to global pressure than had been thought.

The declassified "key findings" provided ammunition to both side in the international dispute over the best approach to Iran, and were expected to fuel rather than quench the often bitter US debate over Iran policy ahead of the November 2008 presidential elections.

Meanwhile, Iran on Tuesday welcomed a US intelligence report

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

Held teachers, students might be freed soon

Says DU VC after meeting CA, Moeen

DU CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka University Vice-chancellor (VC) Prof SMA Faiz yesterday said the teachers and students who were arrested in connection with the August 20-22 violence on the campus might be released soon.

He did not mention any date in this regard but said, "We hope it would not be too long."

He made the comments during a press briefing at his office after he had meetings with the chief adviser and the army chief at their offices yesterday.

Replying to a question, he said it is still uncertain how they would be freed, on bail or due to the withdrawal of the case. The VC said the authorities concerned got

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

Southkhali victims need house building help

HASAN JAHD TUSHER,
Southkhali, Sharonkhola, Bagerhat

Most of the Sidr victims in the worst-hit Southkhali in Bagerhat's Sharonkhola upazila are apparently happy about relief distribution, but they all want to return to their previous jobs that include agriculture, fishing, and small businesses.

As relief materials from both the government and non-government sources are pouring in, locals demand that they should also be given cash to resume their work and rebuild houses.

"We want to repair our houses, buy cattle for cultivation and boats for fishing. We need cash money. By the grace of almighty Allah, we don't have a lack of food right now,"

said Shahidul Islam of Pedabari village.

During visits to different villages of Southkhali, it has been found that almost all the houses, roadside grocery shops and boats damaged in the cyclone still remain in ruins.

Talking to The Daily Star, many of the victims say they are getting adequate food items, but they need cooking materials first to cook those.

Ayesha Begum of North Southkhali says, "We can't cook as all the cooking materials have been washed away during the cyclone."

Like Ayesha, Fatima Begum, Kahirnoor, Hosne Ara, Sharmeen, Kulsum, Shahida Begum, and hundreds of others demand that cooking materials be distributed in addition to cash money, boat,

cattle, and nets.

The government and private relief providers have concentrated their relief operations in different areas of Southkhali, but allegations of mismanagement or lack of coordination are still rife.

Food, drinking water and medicines are not being distributed equitably and according to specific needs of a locality, relief seekers allege.

They say the residents of Pedabari (Police Camp Road) and those who live on north border of North Southkhali are not receiving adequate aid due to poor road communications.

Around 40 families of the village say most of the relief has been distributed in South Southkhali.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

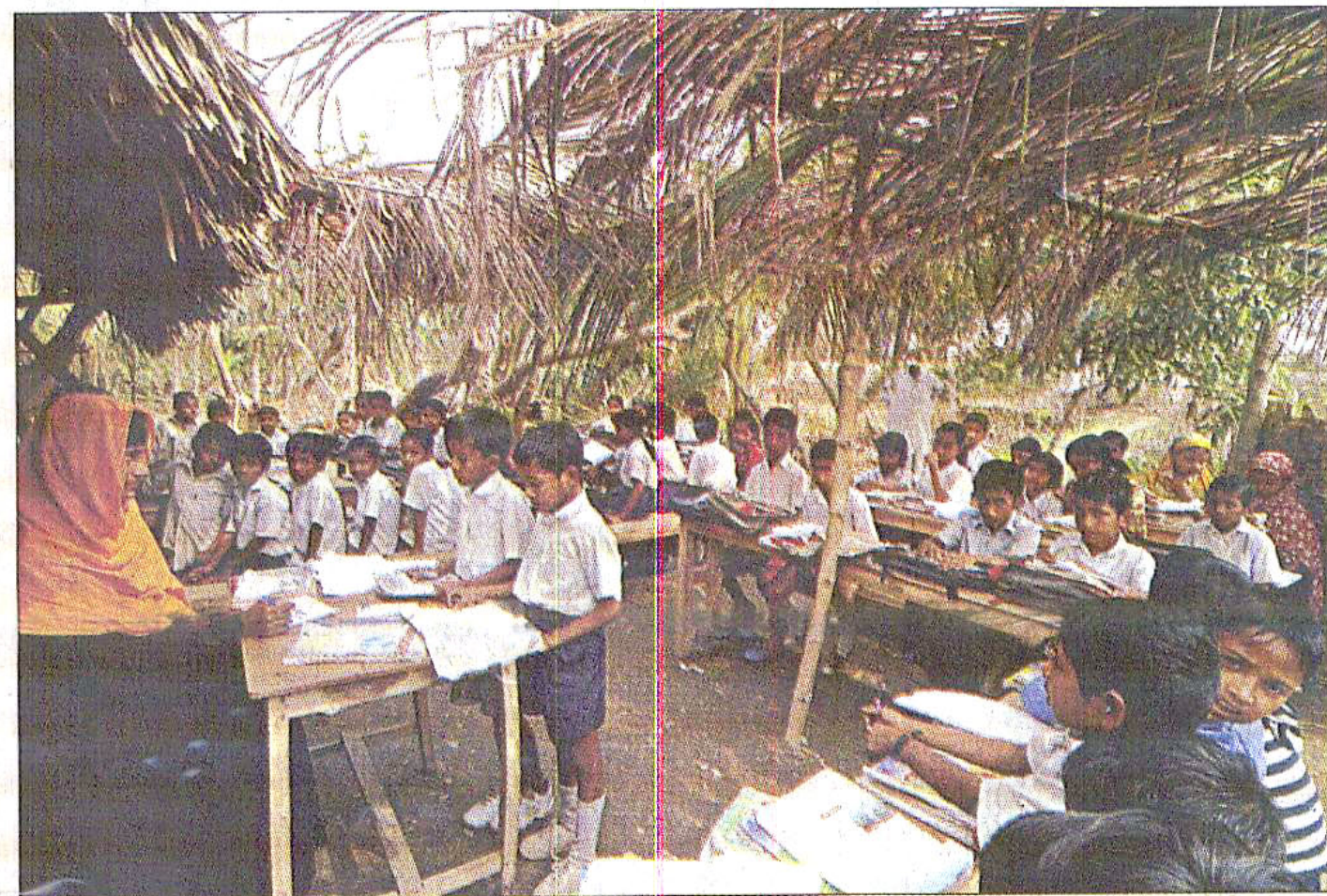


PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Students of Shubho Vidya Niketan at Amargachhia of Sharonkhola yesterday have their lessons in a classroom built with bamboo and coconut leaves as the November 15 cyclone destroyed the school building.

PARTY UNITY Delwar 'under pressure' to accept Saifur's offer

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN

Khandaker Delwar Hossain, Khaleda Zia-appointed secretary general of BNP, is allegedly under renewed pressure to accept the 'unity proposal' given by Saifur Rahman, the acting chairman appointed by the party's standing committee.

Delwar's close aide Rizvi Ahmed, also the acting office secretary of the party's pro-Khaleda faction, yesterday told The Daily Star that certain quarters have been pressurising Delwar to accept the proposal.

of the party's pro-Khaleda faction, yesterday told The Daily Star that certain quarters have been pressurising Delwar to accept the proposal.

Most pro-Khaleda leaders and former lawmakers of BNP view

Saifur's unity initiative as a new 'conspiracy' against Khaleda Zia and they do not want Delwar to make any compromise with pro-Saifur leaders.

Leaders of the pro-Saifur faction are planning to unite both factions of BNP by appointing a new acting secretary general who would be acceptable to all, keeping Saifur Rahman as the acting chairman in Khaleda's absence, said several BNP leaders.

Delwar would even be encouraged to discuss the proposal with detained party chief Khaleda, sources said.

"According to the media reports and observing the situation, it seems to me that different quarters are putting pressure on him [Delwar] with the initiative. Party

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

JMB MEN'S COMILLA JAILBREAK Probe body suspects links of a few staff

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The five JMB militants imprisoned in Comilla claim their attempt to break free was their own effort, but the probe committees suspect some jail officials and employees were involved.

Five militants of the banned Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) made a bid to escape from Comilla Jail on November 25.

Two committees were formed to probe the jail-breaking and five security men were suspended.

Sources said a four-member committee formed by the home ministry and headed by a joint secretary submitted its report to the home secretary on Sunday mentioning negligence of some jail

officials.

The report also includes statements of the five militants. -- Nabil Rahman, son of executed JMB chief Shaekh Rahman, Shamim, Redwan, Rongil and Minhaj -- who are undergoing treatment in Dhaka.

Nabil, Shamim and Redwan are receiving treatment at Dhaka Central Jail Hospital and Rongil and Minhaj at the BSMMU.

DIG (Prisons) Maj Shamsul Haider Siddique said another two-member committee formed by the jail authorities would submit its report to the IG (Prisons) today or tomorrow.

Maj Haider, member of the four-member committee, said Minhaj

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

BIBIYANA POWER PLANT Three bidders pre-qualified

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday announced names of pre-qualified bidders for the 450-MW Bibiyana Power Plant project.

Two bidders from the US -- AES Corporation and Chevron Corporation -- and Korea Electric Power Corporation from South Korea have been pre-qualified

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

JOINING POLLS

Pak opposition thrashes out demands

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani opposition leaders Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto set their parties to work yesterday on a list of demands they say the government must meet to stop them boycotting elections in January.

The former premiers agreed to join forces at a meeting late Monday, saying that they would consider boycotting next month's crucial vote if President Pervez Musharraf does not agree to extra steps for free polls.

Musharraf last week pledged to lift a month-old state of emergency by December 16, ahead of the key

polls on January 8, but the opposition say the vote will still be unfair.

A committee set up by the parties of the two ex-premiers to draft the "charter of demands" had its maiden session on Tuesday, Sharif's spokesman Ahsan Iqbal told AFP.

"They have started work now," Iqbal said.

The chairman of Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz party, Raja Zafarul Haq, said the committee's demands would be based on the discussions between Sharif and Benazir on Monday night but would focus on fair elections.

"The committee is expected to finalise its work soon, I think in two

or three days," he said.

The meeting took place at the legal chambers of senator Raza Rabbani, a senior official from Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party.

Rabbani stressed the need for an independent election commission and said local authorities were giving "undue favour" to pro-Musharraf candidates.

Any boycott could drastically damage the credibility of elections that are supposed to stabilise the nuclear-armed nation of 160 million people, seen as a bulwark against al-Qaeda and Taliban militants.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

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