

## Govt's talk with parties

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comment on it without knowing its legal basis."

Maj Gen Aminul Karim said the current political culture of the country is of a low quality and the military gets the opportunity in this situation to exercise power, but ultimately the country must return to democracy.

Survival of the present caretaker government must be ensured, as it is the last resort for the people of this country right now, said the military secretary to the president adding that the people cannot afford to let this government fail.

Saying that the country is at a crossroads right now, the major general warned that it might veer off to 'some other destination' if the present government fails.

"The political parties must also come forward positively for dialogues with the government," he added.

Criticising some advisers to the caretaker government, Maj Gen Aminul Karim said, "They don't even go to villages and don't visit the grassroots."

He suggested the government to appoint consultants for smooth running of the administration.

The military secretary to the president hoped that the much awaited upcoming election will be held on schedule and the armed forces will go back to the barracks.

He however favoured formation of a national security council for solving national crises.

1/11 might not have occurred if the country had a national security council at the time, said Aminul Karim.

He urged the political parties not to 'invent new issues' to confront the government with.

Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud, a noted economist, said, "In the past, elected governments turned into autocratic ones, devaluing state organisations."

He said the system of democracy is the most durable system for resolving all disputes while military intervention is a temporary solution.

He said a 'citizens charter' could be formed, like the one in 1991, taking opinions from all political parties, on the basis of which elected governments would work and be accountable as well.

He urged the government not to veer off the declared 'election roadmap', saying, "The government must dispel all public doubts regarding holding of the election."

He said there is no alternative to dialogues between the government and political parties for moving forward in accordance with the declared electoral roadmap of the government as well as for pushing forward the government's initiatives.

M Hafizuddin Khan said, "There is a public perception that the government is not in the driving seat anymore."

"It seems that the government does not have enough savvy to face the present crisis," said the former adviser to a caretaker government, adding that the present caretaker government also seems less cognizant of public sufferings.

The present caretaker government failed to fulfil the public expectation, he added.

"There is a lack of confidence in the public mind about the care-

taker government right now," said the former bureaucrat adding that it is however difficult to run a country with 10 advisers.

He also urged the government to dispel any public confusion regarding holding of the much delayed election.

About formation of a national security council he said there is no need to form such a council.

"We don't have any external threat and therefore we don't need any national security council for internal management," said M Hafizuddin Khan.

"It's absurd that a national security council would resolve the political problems and other crises," he quipped.

He said only an election will not bring democracy to the country, the political culture also need to change for that to happen.

He also urged to amend the constitution to remove some of the weaknesses in it.

Prof Muzaffer Ahmad said, "Reforms in political parties alone are not enough, political leaders have to change their attitudes as well."

He said the culture of having a 'democracy of only raising hands in the parliament', and of 'one day democracy of the election day' must be changed.

Sultana Kamal said there are many questions in the public mind about the role the army intends to play in the future.

The country is passing through a difficult time, said the former adviser to a caretaker government.

She also urged the government to hold dialogues with political parties for tackling the present crisis.

AL Acting General Secretary Syed Asraf Islam said, "Dialogues with political parties has become a national demand now."

He said the present government must succeed for the sake of the country's future.

"Till now they [the caretaker government] have been the last hope and we want their success," added Ashraf.

He criticised heavily the activities of Law Adviser Mainul Hossain and Food Adviser Tapan Chowdhury, demanding their immediate removal from the council of advisers.

The AL leader also criticised President Iajuddin Ahmed for his role during the short lived tenure of the immediate past caretaker government and demanded his removal too.

He said there are conspiracies being hatched by saboteurs within the government to make it fail.

"Conspiracies are going on to destroy the electoral roadmap of the government," the AL acting general secretary said.

Maj (ret'd) Hafizuddin Ahmed of BNP said it is not possible to resolve the manifold problems of the country without an election.

He said the country has democracy only on papers, not in real life.

He also stressed the need for dialogues between the government and political parties before the upcoming election.

AF Hasan Arif said there is no alternative to holding the election to restore democracy, as the fate of the country depends on them.

Ali Riaz in his speech said there is a lack of dynamism in the government's style of running the country. It has failed in some cases, which need to be remedied, he added.

## Rice price

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have yet to be fixed.

India earlier slapped a ban on rice export to ensure its own food security.

Talking to The Daily Star, the economists said the government must act urgently to increase rice supply in the market through import.

They also suggested that the government provide free food for 1.5 crore poor people until the next Boro harvest.

About the suggestion, the food secretary said, "The government has resources and they will be utilised properly."

It has a stock enough to run programmes like food for work and VGF till March, he said.

Akbar Ali Khan said as per the food budget, the government targets to procure 23 lakh tonnes of food grains in the current fiscal. "Of that, 10 lakh tonnes were to be imported while the rest procured locally," he said.

But under the present circumstances, the government would not be able to attain the target.

"It has already missed the goal set for the last Boro season," he said adding that it might end up procuring a maximum of 7 lakh tonnes of rice in the current fiscal.

Due to the procurement failure, the government already needed to import 16 lakh tonnes.

In addition to that, 8-10 lakh tonnes of rice would have to be imported now to recover the losses in natural calamities.

"That means the government needs to import at least 25 lakh tonnes of food grains in the current fiscal and 75 percent of that should have been imported in the first seven months," he noted.

He said according to the current fiscal budget, the government has a plan to provide 50 lakh poor people with food for free, but in light of the present crisis the number should be revised to 1.5 crore.

For quick import of rice, he suggested government-to-government level dealing.

Zaid Bakht said the government made a delayed response to the possibility of food crisis. "The steps they are now taking should have been taken before," he said.

Criticising the government's plan, BIDS research director said, "It should consider the worst-case scenario and must not formulate plans on optimistic views only."

It seems like the government did not consider the adverse effects of floods and cyclone on rice production, he said.

Zaid said, "Since it's a non-political government it did not get the response from the grassroots level properly."

He thinks there must not be anymore delay in the proposed import of five lakh tonnes of rice from India.

**PRICES SITUATION**  
The price of rice in both the wholesale and retail markets started to fall yesterday. The price of one maund of coarse rice in the wholesale markets dropped by Tk 30-50 while it was Tk 10-30 in case of fine rice.

Prices of different varieties of rice in the kitchen markets came down by Tk 1-2 per kg.

Traders said the demand for war criminals' trial getting momentum recently, Irene's visit will feature meetings with the government where her team will share AI's experience in Latin America, Cambodia and Africa on trial of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

"While sharing our experience, we'll tell the government what and how they can do something in this regard," Irene told reporters.

Saying that there have been a lot of progress in international laws regarding war crimes and crimes against humanity since 1971 to facilitate the trial, she said, "The present international principle, Principle of Universal Jurisdiction, means any war criminal, no matter where he is staying, needs to be tried for the crimes he had done, no matter where he has done that."

Asked whether the AI would pursue the trial of war criminals in international arena in case the government does not initiate the process, Irene said, "Amnesty International doesn't lodge such cases directly, but other organisations do... If they (war criminals) go to other countries, they can be arrested and cases can be lodged against them."

Irene noted that the history of Bangladesh is turbulent, full of injustices. But the current situation brings her hope.

"To my own feeling, this is a window of opportunity to initiate institutional reform that can turn the trend this country has suffered from."

The culture of impunity 'which goes back to 1971' is almost an institutional problem now, she said, "Therefore, you need institutional change."

She stressed the need for an independent judiciary, police reform, actions to address mal-treatment and torture, a strong national human rights commission and freedom of information legislation.

The AI is going to launch 'Campaign for Human Dignity' next year with focus on accountability of governments, big businesses and others, access of the poor to justice, services and rights, discrimination, and participation of people.

The AI delegation will meet senior members of the caretaker government including Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed, Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury and Law Adviser Mainul Hossain. The schedule for meeting Army Chief General Moeen U Ahmed is yet to be fixed.

At its meetings with the government, the AI will raise the issue of release of cartoonist Arifur

## Strong local govt

**FROM PAGE 1**  
Committee Chairman AMM Sawkat Ali also spoke on the occasion.

About 10,000 chairmen, ward commissioners and members of union parishes, municipalities and city corporations from across the country attended the conference.

The CA said apart from expediting local development, the government through effective decentralisation will be able to build a strong and partnership-oriented democratic system which will intensify the nation's struggle against poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition and corruption.

The head of the caretaker government informed that he has already directed the authorities concerned to review the recommendations of the committee and implement it quickly.

He told the elected local government representatives that they would help further advance the reform activities of the government by making valuable suggestions and recommendations on problems and prospects of the local government institutions through open discussion in the conference.

Referring to the government's anti-corruption drive to rid the society of the curse of corruption, the CA said enough successes have already been achieved from the drive and a good number of corruption suspects have been punished by courts.

He hoped that local government and representatives of local government would play a stronger role in preventing corruption and building a social movement against the corruption across the country.

About general election by 2008, the CA said the Election Commission is working as per its announced roadmap to hold a free, fair and credible election and the government is extending all-out cooperation in implementing the roadmap.

In this regard, he mentioned completion of enrolling over 20 million voters with photographs by the Election Commission.

Appreciating the activities of the local government representatives in facing the two back-to-back floods and Cyclone Sidr, he said the government has successfully faced the aftermath of the cyclone with the help of all.

He said the relief operation was carried out fairly and hoped that rehabilitation programme would also be completed smoothly and properly.

The recommendations of the seven-member committee on "Accelerating and Strengthening Local Government" also include raising the number of wards in union councils to 15 from 9, fixing the number of directly elected members of district councils at between 20 and 35 on the number of upazilas in a particular district, raising the reserved seats for

women members from the existing 30 percent to 40 percent for the next three elections on rotation basis, recognising the elected chairman at municipality level as "mayor" and the elected commissioners of municipalities and city corporations as "Councillors".

It also recommends that all local government institutions will bring out "Citizen Charter" and update it every year.

As per the recommendations, if a candidate is found guilty of criminal offence by court and imprisoned for at least six months and five years have not passed after his release, he will not be eligible to contest the election.

If any loan of a candidate taken from the council remains outstanding or if the candidate has any financial liability with the council and if he is a member of another local government institution or national parliament, if he was dismissed from service of a semi-government organisation, autonomous body, cooperative society due to moral turpitude, corruption, misconduct so on and five years have not passed since his dismissal, he will be disqualified for contesting the election.

**Razakar's list**

**FROM PAGE 16**  
include the names of Razakars in the district, he added.

The list would be formally announced on March 25, a day before the Independence Day, at a reunion of freedom fighters in Patakhali.

Among others, seven women tortured by the Pakistani occupation forces during the liberation war in 1971 were present.

**Aziz blames**

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implement tax related laws without discrimination. Otherwise, it will give rise to corruption.

"You are to implement all laws and rules uniformly to avoid any sort of corruption," he said.

The finance adviser directed the NBR officials to act in a manner that will foster business and trade friendly. "Otherwise, it will create obstacle to overall macro-economic position of the country," he said.

Describing corruption by a section of NBR officials as a major obstacle to investment and employment, Aziz said this will not bring anything good for the country.

He termed the tax system of the country "progressive" and said the aim of this system is to reduce income gap among the people.

About the Citizen Charter, the adviser said it is a good initiative. But success of it lies in effective coordination of the service taker and the service provider.

"It seems to me that most of the people of this country are honest and want to lead a honest living," he added.

## AI expects govt

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Coinciding with the demand for war criminals' trial getting momentum recently, Irene's visit will feature meetings with the government where her team will share AI's experience in Latin America, Cambodia and Africa on trial of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

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## Tigers

**FROM PAGE 16**  
total, which was a mere 137, but also broke the previous first wicket best of 133 by Tamim's elder brother Nafis Iqbal and Javed Omar Belim. Besides, their individual efforts were also the highest by any Bangladesh pair against New Zealand and the highest partnership of this Test.

Tamim and Zunaed showed there was plenty of fight in the Bangladesh camp after an inspired spell of pace spearhead Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (4-74) saw Bangladesh bowl a side out for the first time in seven Tests.

If Tamim and Zunaed were under pressure in their first Test, they rarely showed. Their association didn't start pretty -- Tamim was dropped by Iain O'Brien and a slog off Daniel Vettori was misjudged by Chris Martin in the deep -- but the openers fought through a testing passage against a moving new ball. Initially eager to manufacture runs, they wisely settled down to press for time. But that didn't mean the scoring rate reduced. Ticking along at around five runs an over, Zunaed played some convincing drives down the ground while Tamim, happier to get onto the back foot, hooked and pulled fours. The team's fifty was on the board in the 11th over.

The two played on New Zealand's mind. Anything full was driven firmly by Zunaed, prompting the seamers to hold back the length, at which time Tamim flashed hard and picked the gaps, more often than not. Zunaed got to fifty first, thumping O'Brien for four, and his maiden effort was well appreciated by a raucous dressing room. Tamim slogged Vettori to bring up the team 100 in the 20th over and soon celebrated his second fifty of the match, driving the Kiwi skipper against the spin for four. While Vettori struggled to locate his angle Tamim put him away through cover-point.

Earlier, Bell and Oram had featured in a 139-run partnership for New Zealand but received little support on a wicket which did not appear to hold any demons for the batsmen.

When Bell, who made 107, and Jacob Oram, 117, were in full flight, New Zealand appeared on track for a lead well in excess of 300.

Bell, on his return to the national fold after being unwanted for the past six years, weathered a shaky period in the 90s and survived a confident leg before wicket appeal on 97 before scoring his second Test hundred.

Ten runs later he was out lbw to Mashrafe.

Oram reached his fourth Test century three balls after lunch with his 16th boundary before he was bowled by Mortaza.

Kyle Mills was caught behind first ball leaving O'Brien to thwart the hatrick before he was last out for five.

The introduction of the second new ball saw the last four New Zealand wickets tumble for just 37 runs.

For Bangladesh, pace man Mashrafe had the best bowling figures with four for 74 off 23 overs.

**Salam Pintu**

**FROM PAGE 16**  
Department (CID) which is investigating the case, said when contacted yesterday.

Family sources said plainclothes law enforcers picked up Pintu along with former BNP lawyer Nazir Hossain from a city house on Road-23 in Gulshan on Thursday night. Nazir was released later on that day.

Pintu's name as one of the plotters of the grenade attack has already been mentioned in statements by detained Harkatul Jihad al Islami (Hujji) operations commander Mufti Abdul Hannan and some others of the banned militant outfit, sources said.

One of the meetings of the perpetrators of the grisly attack was allegedly held at Pintu's Dhanmondi residence.

The sources also said Pintu's brother Maulana Tajuddin introduced Hannan to him. Tajuddin, supplier of the grenades used in the attack, is a fugitive accused in the case and is now hiding in an African state.

Hannan and the other detainees in their confessional statements said around 12 militants carried out the attack that left 24 AL leaders and workers dead and at least 300 injured.

**Steps taken**

**FROM PAGE 1**  
tonnes of rice from there. "Tender has been floated to import 1.2 lakh tonnes of rice from Thailand while a process to import rice from Vietnam is going on."

The CA mentioned various government steps, including OMS, VGF, VGD, TR and Food-for-Work programme, and hoped that these steps would cast a positive impact on the prices of commodities and stabilise the food prices.

IFTFKHAR-PRANAB TELEPHONE TALKS

Talking to the Indian minister over phone, the foreign adviser said an official negotiating team would soon be in India for the purpose.

Bangladesh government will procure the rice from Indian state agencies, said a foreign ministry handout yesterday.

Wishing each other "a happy new year", they hoped that the bilateral relations between the two countries would further improve for mutual benefits during the current year.

Speaking to the media, Iftekhar expressed satisfaction at the reported decision by the Indian government to lift ban on Bangladesh investments in India.

"My belief is that it will help those Bangladeshi businessmen who are eager to invest in north-eastern India," the adviser said.

## War criminals

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criminals could not be brought to justice in the past because of political opportunists. He urged the government to invite representatives of the United Nations and learn from them how war criminals in other countries were tried.

He said a number of war criminals have been abusing Islam to shield themselves. He said all, including the religious people of the country who love Islam, want trial of the war criminals.

Three out of the four panellists at the BBC Bangladesh Sanglap demanded immediate resignation of Food and Disaster Management Adviser Tapan Chowdhury for his "irresponsible remarks" about the soaring prices of rice.

Manna said, "He [the food adviser] knows nothing about the government's initiatives and that is why he has the right to stay in the cabinet no more." He said a number of the advisers to the caretaker government did not have any experience in running the country.

Nazrul Islam Khan and Mahfuz Anam also demanded the resignation of the food adviser.

Terminating the demand logical, Nazrul Islam Khan said he has doubts whether the adviser would resign.

"Of course we demand the resignation of the adviser. His remarks apparently made the government look worthless, powerless and irresponsible. We do not want such kind of advisers who do not take responsibilities for their job," said Mahfuz Anam, in response to a query from an audience.

He said these kinds of advisers are pushing the government towards failure.

At a press briefing on Tuesday, Tapan Chowdhury said the government now has nothing to do with reducing the prices of rice.

Irene Khan said the government should take responsibility if a crisis appears and it should be accountable.

Both the AL and BNP leaders expressed their doubts whether the election would be held on time.

Responding to a query whether the parliamentary elections would be held within the year 2008, Irene Khan said it would depend on the role of the political parties, the caretaker government, the military and the people. "The elections would certainly be held if all wanted the elections," she said.

About the army's role in holding the elections, Irene Khan said the Bangladesh Army could set an example by promoting democracy.

She said the government should put a time limit on the state of emergency. She also said like the previous governments since 1971, this government did not bring the violators of human rights to justice or follow different international human rights rules properly.

She urged the government to have dialogues with the members of the civil society and political parties before setting up the National Human Rights Commission.

The Daily Star editor said the preparation of a flawless voter list with national identity cards, among other things, is going on to make sure that the elections are held in a free and fair manner. "I do

not see any sign that the elections would not be held on time," he said.

The editor urged the government to initiate dialogues with political parties as early as possible to end confusions and doubts.

Terminating the current emergency rule an unusual situation, he urged the government to put a quick end to this situation.

Manna said different issues including finding out the war criminals and their trial might come to fore in the coming days. This could make the situation complicated for holding the elections on time.

Nazrul said the state of emergency should be lifted as people have aspiration for a free and fair election.

## Troops overrun

**FROM PAGE 16**  
The Minority Rights Group International said Colombo's decision to formally withdraw from the ceasefire deal with the rebels would result in escalating violence and lead to more rights abuses against minority Tamils and Muslims.

The Scandinavian monitoring mission appointed to oversee the ceasefire will cease operations January 16 following the government's decision announced earlier this week.

"There is now going to be a greater void in the monitoring and reporting of human rights abuses in the conflict zone," Minority Rights Group's director Mark Latimer said in a statement received here.

"The need for international human rights monitors is now ever more crucial," Latimer said.

Sri Lanka has rejected previous calls for a UN rights mission here.

The rights group accused the Sri Lankan government of reducing security of key minority politicians and called on Colombo to ensure proper protection for minority political leaders.

The statement came after opposition Tamil lawmaker T. Maheswaran was gunned down earlier this week in Colombo as he prayed at a Hindu Temple.

## British MP

**FROM PAGE 16**  
This is Main's second visit to Dhaka since the political crisis over election issues cropped up in Bangladesh. She last came here before the stalled elections slated for January 22 last year.