

EC asks CA to relax

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replied to a query on whether the state of emergency will be lifted in respective areas before the city corporation polls.

The CEC made the comment as he was leaving the EC Secretariat premises to meet the chief adviser in the latter's office.

At the meeting the EC also apprised the caretaker government chief of the progress in its work of preparing the voter list and of other preparatory works for holding the stalled ninth parliamentary election before the year end, the sources said.

During the discussion on the draft ordinance for freeing the EC Secretariat, the chief adviser, who was accompanied by the law adviser, explained the government's position for empowering the CEC to control the EC Secretariat. The EC however will discuss further with the chief adviser the issue of separating the EC Secretariat from the Prime Minister's Office, the sources added.

The CEC arrived at the Office of the Chief Adviser an hour before the schedule while the other two election commissioners - Muhammad Sakhat Hussain and Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sahawat Hussain, were on schedule.

Talking to reporters in the afternoon CEC Huda said all preparations for the parliamentary election will be completed according to the electoral roadmap which stipulated that the polls to local government bodies would start being held in January of this year to continue till December. EC MEET ON CITY CORP POLLS

The EC yesterday decided to complete all preparations by March 20 for holding the long over due polls to four city corporations and nine municipalities, so that elections to those local government bodies can take place in April.

But the caretaker government has yet to decide whether the state of emergency will be lifted or relaxed in those areas, which is now the main obstacle to creating an environment conducive to holding the polls in April to those municipalities and the city corporations of Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal and Sylhet, while the election to Dhaka City Corporation is scheduled for May.

According to its decision to begin holding polls to local government bodies, the EC will soon begin publishing draft voter lists with photographs for the city corporations and the municipalities, for scrutiny.

From the dates of publication of the draft lists, it will take at least a month to complete the entire process of finalising the lists in line with electoral rolls rules which is scheduled to be formulated in a couple of days, the EC sources said.

Besides, setting up polling stations in the four city corporations and the nine municipalities, printing of materials to be used for conducting the polls, and reforming the election laws relating to local government bodies are scheduled to be completed by March 20, the sources added.

Registration of eligible voters with their photographs attached to the voter lists for the four city corporations and the nine municipalities has already been completed. The army, which has been active at the field level in voter listing, is likely to hand-over draft voter lists to the EC today for the four city corporations and for seven of the nine municipalities.

The EC Secretariat is currently preparing to publish drafts of those, the sources said.

According to the EC's electoral roadmap announced on July 15, publication of draft electoral rolls

was supposed to begin in October of last year, two months after the beginning of the field level work of preparing the voter list with photographs.

The preparations are completed by March 20, then the EC will go to the city corporations and the municipalities. It will take more than a month to really hold the polls from the date of schedule announcement.

So, the polls are likely to take place either at the end of April or in early May.

The EC however has yet to decide whether the polls to the city corporations and the municipalities will take place simultaneously or on different dates. Senior officials in the EC Secretariat however hinted that the due polls to the Dhaka City Corporation will be held in May, if everything goes according to plans.

The voter list for Dhaka City Corporation area is yet to be completed, the EC sources said.

Tenure of the city corporations of Dhaka, Rajshahi and Khulna expired in May last year while tenure of the city corporations of Barisal and Sylhet expired in last November and December respectively. According to election laws, polls to the five city corporations are supposed to be held within 180 days prior to the expiration of their tenure.

But elections could not be held to the city corporations on time due to the state of emergency and for a lack of fair voter lists.

Other than the mayor of Dhaka City Corporation, all other mayors of city corporations have been in detentions for quite a long time now on charges of corruption, while many ward commissioners of the corporations are on the lam as they were also indicted for corruption.

Sources in the EC Secretariat said on the current voter lists Rajshahi City Corporation has a total of 2.60 lakh voters compared to 2.74 lakh on the previous list prepared in 2006, Khulna City Corporation has 3.98 lakh compared to 4.81 lakh on the previous one, Barisal has 1.77 lakh compared to 2.04 lakh on the previous list, Sylhet has 2.54 lakh compared to its 2.55 lakh voters on the previous list, and Chittagong City Corporation has 15.52 lakh compared to 14.44 lakh on the last one. A total of 14.45 lakh voters have already been registered in Dhaka City Corporation area so far, and the number is likely to increase as registrations go on.

Swiss

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Internasional Indonesia, one of the largest banks in Indonesia. It also acquired a controlling interest in Bank Bumiputera, a mid-size bank from the same country, expanding its frontiers in the banking industry.

To date, the banks operating under the ICB Banking Group are expanding and consolidating their presence in the countries where financial services represent a significant pillar of the economy and constitute the fastest growing sector in the country.

In 2004, the individual ownerships of the ICB Banking Group were corporatised under the umbrella of ICB Financial Group Holdings AG.

On 17th May 2007, ICB Financial Group Holdings AG was listed on AIM market of the London Stock Exchange.

a table and said, "I won't continue with the case here."

The prosecution lawyer however tried yet again to make Azam deliver on the contract but to no avail.

In response to the developments, the defence submitted an application asking the judge to "ensure justice by permitting examination of witnesses on behalf of the petitioner".

As the court clerk hesitated to receive the application, Sheikh Hasina, also a former prime minister, told him that she would not leave the dock if the petition was not taken.

In the petition, the defence said, "The deposition taken today (yesterday) should be expunged, otherwise impartiality of the court will come into question and the petitioner will be deprived of justice."

Hasina and Selim stood in the dock all along as the lawyers continued heated argument.

The trial of the case began on January 30 with the plaintiff's deposition in which he said he knows Selim as the only accused.

Managing director of Eastcoast Trading Pvt Ltd, Azam also alleged that the then health minister had threatened that he would stop the work of setting up power plant at Siddharganj if he was not given the money.

ACC focuses

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November last year, he said the decision on the matter would be made very soon.

Mashud said the verdict of the cases, proceedings of which remain stayed, will decide the fate of the next cases.

He said the ACC would take interview of the officials who had not been absorbed from the now-defunct bureau of Anti-Corruption on February 7. Of them, those who are skilled and have good track records would be absorbed in the ACC.

A total of 263 staffs were not absorbed into the ACC from the bureau of Anti-Corruption after the commission was formed in 2004.

Seven months

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"According to the Chief Election Commissioner's statement, the election schedule would be announced in October. If it's true, how will it be possible to complete the process for holding the polls by 2008," he asked.

The AL leader demanded that the EC must hold the election by June-July.

Replying to a query whether the government is not making any preparation to hold the polls early, they now want it to hold the elections by June-July.

He urged the government to lift the state of emergency as early as possible adding that the country is not in such a critical situation to remain under the state of emergency.

The AL acting president said their first demand is the immediate release of party chief Sheikh Hasina. They would continue their movement until she is freed, he said.

Zillur said at first the government has to release Hasina and then hand over power to an elected government after holding a free, fair and credible election.

The AL leader also demanded trial of the war criminals saying that the people of the country are united over the matter.

Prior to the meeting, Zillur unveiled a book titled "Ekattorer Ghatok O Dalader Bichar" written by journalist Mostak Hossain.

AL leader Dr Dipu Moni and Nazma Rahman also spoke at the meeting chaired by JML President Nazma Akhtar.

JML General Secretary Apu Ukil, Sabina Akhtar Tuhin and Farida Yesmin, among others, were present.

BNP's internal

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said the statement of the chairperson's attorney could have been verified before rejecting it outright.

"Why should we reject the statement before we are sure about its authenticity?" he said while talking to reporters.

On Friday, Khaleda's attorney Mahbub Uddin Khokon, after visiting BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia at sub jail, told reporters, "She has asked to unite the party and urged the nationalist forces to unite for the sake of the party and the country."

Responding to the comment, Delwar on Sunday termed the Khokon's comment to "the media" 'intentional', saying that he did not get any such message from the chairperson through her lawyer.

Meanwhile, a few party leaders who have long been tight-lipped over the division in the party have taken the initiative to hold a discussion between Saifur Rahman and Delwar, said party insiders.

Party leaders said a former minister, who is also a vice president of the party, yesterday spoke with a few leaders from both the factions in a bid to convince Delwar and Saifur sit together and forge unity in the party.

Party insiders said both Delwar and Bhuiyan are obstacles to the unification process as Delwar insists on unifying the party without Bhuiyan and Ashraf. Whereas Bhuiyan continues to advocate both unification process and implementation of reforms in the party simultaneously.

According to the party leaders, a group of pro-reform leaders on Sunday held a meeting and discussed the latest political situation. They are planning to mount pressure inside the party for the unification of the party as well as implementation of reforms to make the party democratic.

Govt to monitor

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monitor the market on a regular basis," the commerce adviser said.

He mentioned that the meeting was convened as part of the government's ongoing efforts to identify the reasons behind the instability in the market and take necessary measures to address the problem.

The government, he said, is giving utmost importance on building up a market management based on proper information.

Hossain Zillur said the government is working to ensure stability in the market, enhance efficiency in the marketing process and keep the poor consumers' foods cheap by giving subsidy.

To achieve the goal, he said, the government is in a continuous process to have interactions with different stakeholders.

He said that getting information on products in proper time and making a forecast on that basis could help a lot in keeping the market stable.

"If we can harmonise demand and supply and can make early forecast, the prices will come down and instability will go."

The commerce adviser said one of the main jobs of the government is to do something for the poor so that they can get foods at cheaper price.

He said the traders and business leaders have agreed to work together with the government and exchange information on the local production and international market situation.

Police ordinance

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police department, the officials add. Moreover, the draft ordinance proposes for seven inspectors general of police (IGP) who will be equivalent to secretary. Now only the IGP is a grade-one officer and equivalent to a secretary.

There are eight grade-one officers against 241 first class position in the foreign service, while the police have only one against 1,535 first class officers, said a top police official asking not to be named.

Following an order from the Chief Adviser's Office in March last year, a committee was formed to formulate the draft ordinance for making police a service oriented force by bringing changes to the age-old Bangladesh Police Law, 1961.

Headed by former IGP and caretaker government Adviser SM Shahjahan, representatives from the Chief Adviser's Office, Ministry of Home, Ministry of Law, Dr Kamal Hossain and Associates and the police formulated the draft and submitted it to the Police Headquarters.

The draft was prepared under the supervision and technical help from Police Reforms Programme (PRP) with United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Department for International Development (DFID), and the European Union (EU) funding the PRP.

The police HQ on August 12 last year submitted the draft ordinance to the home ministry, which later asked the former to submit it again after translating it in Bangla and mentioning differences between the draft and the 1961 law.

Police officials say the draft was submitted again around two months ago to the home ministry, which forwarded it to the Chief Adviser's Office.

The CAO sent a letter to the home ministry on January 16 asking for consultation with stakeholders at thana, district and divisional level. The home ministry on January 29 forwarded the order to the police HQ with an additional order to "submit proven information and papers of the consultation workshops".

Sources in the headquarters say they will soon start consultation with the stakeholders and submit its feedback to the home ministry as soon as possible.

The home ministry will then hold an inter-ministerial meeting and send the draft law to the law ministry. The new law is finally supposed to be circulated as an ordinance through approval of the cabinet.

IGP Nur Mohammad said they are sending the draft ordinance to upazilas, districts and divisions for the required consultation. "We'll give them 15 days for it," he told The Daily Star.

Sources in the police HQ say they have already sent messages to upazilas, district and divisions to

48,000 chickens

FROM PAGE 1
BNP flu, also known as avian flu. Kusthia district administration has taken up different steps to combat the menace. Several control rooms have been opened at the offices of district administration, Kusthia municipality, Livestock and Civil Surgeon.

One Narsingdi correspondent reports that 22,000 chickens from 11 poultry farms were culled and buried at Raipura upazila yesterday afternoon in presence of Deputy Commissioner of the district Md Jilfar Rahman.

The presence of the virus was first detected at one Khorshed Miah's farm in Batiara village of the upazila Friday night. Some 500 chickens died here of the flu.

District administration has imposed a red alert in the one-kilometre radius around the affected farm.

In Chittagong, at least 5000 fowls died over the last eight days at Kamaphuli Poultry and Hatching Farm at South Bakalia in the city, reports our correspondent.

Local officials sent samples of the dead fowl to Feni Livestock Research Centre -- which confirmed the presence of the virus -- and Bangladesh Livestock Research Centre (BLRC) from which they expect results soon.

District Livestock officials said they are waiting for a government order (GO) in this regard before they can start culling the birds. They said last night that the culling of the infected fowl would begin the moment the GO arrives.

Local officials have already made lists of the farms and poultry in the area surrounding this farm.

The farm owner meanwhile buried the dead fowls yesterday.

Meanwhile Deputy Commissioner Ashraf Shamim has sought all out cooperation from all government departments including Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) and Health Department to tackle the situation.

CCC Chief Executive Officer AKM Khairul Alam said they have already formed a 47-member vigilance team to monitor the situation in the city while a ten-member central body and 41 committees have been formed to help the livestock officials in culling the infected fowls if required.

About 5000 chickens have died suspiciously at the VIP Poultry and Hatching at Tajhat in Rangpur town during the last seven days.

Our correspondent in Rangpur says a district livestock officer who visited the farm on Sunday advised the owner to send a sample of the dead fowl to the laboratories at Gaubandha and Savar to confirm the presence of avian flu virus. The official said that the fowls could have died of cholera, so they need the test results to confirm the infection at the farm.

An official of the livestock department, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that the rate of death suggests the cause to be other than cholera as on an average 700 chick-

make all arrangements. Former IGP SM Shahjahan who is the head of the committee that formulated the draft ordinance said: "It's a good move to consult with stakeholders and a general people about a proposed law."

He also said the new law is very much necessary for the police and the government should take necessary steps to promulgate the ordinance as soon as possible.

PRP National Project Director and Additional Inspector General of Police NBK Tripathi said they have already initiated a move to print several thousand copies of the draft to distribute those at thana, district and divisional level. He also expressed his hope to hold the consultation workshops as soon as possible.

He said once the draft ordinance is promulgated, the present corporate face of the police will change completely. "We're trying to give the police a humane face which is required in democratic polity."

THE ORDINANCE
Once the draft ordinance is enacted the influence of ruling political parties on the police department will reduce sharply.

The draft proposes that between the ranks of superintendent of police (SP) and IGP no officials can be transferred from their postings within two to three years of assuming the current responsibilities.

Recommendations from any ministers, lawmakers or influential persons for appointments, transfers or promotions will be considered a criminal offence.

The draft focuses on issues like human rights, a police code of conduct, guidelines regarding dealing with women and children, and community policing based on mutual understanding between a community and law enforcers.

Formation of a National Police Commission (NPC) and a Police Complaint Commission (PCC) has also been proposed to supervise policing.

The 11-member NPC will appoint the IGP and investigate any allegations brought against the police chief. Nobody will be able to remove or transfer the IGP without the consent of the commission.

The NPC will also finalise a list of three nominees for the post of the IGP and forward it to the government after scrutinising their service records. Only then the government will appoint one of the nominees as the police boss.

The proposed five-member PCC with a retired judge of the Supreme Court as its chief will ensure accountability of the force.

A former IGP or a former adding the IGP, two representatives from the civil society including a woman, and a retired secretary or a retired additional secretary will be the members.

ens are dying in the farm every day. Panic has spread over the area since neighbouring residents found out the possibility of avian virus infection so close to their homes.

Bird flu virus has also spread in Jhenidah, reports our correspondent. On Sunday night around 1500 poultry were culled in three villages.

Local livestock official Dr Liakot Ali said the avian flu virus was first detected at Mizanur Rahman's poultry farm in Patbila village under Moshapur upazila of the district.

Local officials then arranged the culling at Patbila, Baroipara and Bogavillages the same night.

There have been allegations that Mizanur Rahman sold around 1500 infected fowls to locals at very low price when he first discovered that his fowls were dying.

A government official on Sunday afternoon said that the chief adviser was considering increasing the compensation for poultry farmers as more poultry are culled each day. Poultry traders have been suffering heavy losses since the detection and spread of the virus.

SC stays HC

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under the Emergency Power Rules for trial should not be declared illegal.

On January 16, Towfiq was sent to jail as he surrendered to a Dhaka court in a Tk-3 crore graft case.

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) filed the case in September last year for corruption in awarding a power order to a power company for setting up a barge-mounted power plant in Khulna.

Risky well-3

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Local engineers had tried to kill it, but its pressure doubled and was increasing further. As a result, wells no 6, 8, 9, 10, and an oil refinery institution were in the face of a possible blowout.

The authorities on December 26 last year tasked M/s Boots & Coats, a US-based international blowout expert company, with the well's termination process. The company has successfully done its job and now the finishing work is on, Jahangir said. However, sources say millions of cubic feet of gas is still emitting through thousands of small and big holes in Anandapur and Shiyampur villages due to leaks.

The BGFLC authorities had earlier promised that the emitting of gas would stop after the well's termination. But through the leaks the gas is still emitting. Villagers also said emitting of gas through the leaks remains unchanged.

Jahangir said it would stop in five to six months as a lot of gas may be charged in the seepage area.

He added that they are continuously monitoring the situation and have deputed David Herman Dez, an international well control specialist, to oversee the task.

Law enforcers

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Bangladesh Rifles, Coastguard and the police will increase their patrols following the directive.

Home Adviser Major Gen (ret'd) MA Martin chaired yesterday's meeting also attended by LGRD Adviser Anwarul Iqbal and Law Adviser AF Hassan Arif.

According to an intelligence agency report, the dealers pick up fertiliser from factories and pass those to the smugglers through different syndicates. The smugglers, pretending to be fishermen, use engine boats to take the fertiliser to Myanmar.

"The reason behind smuggling fertiliser to Myanmar is its high price there," a BDR official told The Daily Star yesterday.

Whereas a kilogram of fertiliser costs around Tk 24 in Myanmar and Tk 12 in India, a farmer in Bangladesh gets it just for Tk 5 (subsidised price), officials said.

As the Myanmar government's production of agricultural fertiliser cannot meet the domestic demand, the smuggling of fertiliser from Bangladesh is thriving.

The Burmese junta just turns a blind eye to the illegal trade of fertiliser to fill the demand and supply gap, local officials said.

Members of Bangladesh Navy, Coastguard and BDR seize fertiliser from fishing boats in the sea and Naf river during their regular drives. However, this does not appear to have much effect in deterring the smuggling.

No recent statistics about fertiliser smuggled out from Bangladesh to Myanmar or India was immediately available with home ministry officials yesterday.

In the wake of several incidents of suicide resulted from eve-teasing, the advisory council directed superintendent of police (SP) and officers-in-charge of police stations to step up surveillance around schools and start motivational programmes at schools for the students, teachers and guardians.

Discussing recent agitations at the readymade garments sector, the meeting asked the intelligence agencies to foil any 'instigation' by any foreign agency or NGO in these cases.

The meeting was told that some such people have already been arrested for alleged instigation.

Responding to a proposal of providing gunmen to judicial and chief judicial magistrates, the meeting asked the law ministry to provide details such as how many gunmen will be needed.

Discussing a proposal of replacing the age-old firearms now being used by guards of different government, semi-government and non-government banks with 22-bore rifles, the meeting asked to submit a complete and detailed proposal. Of the 163 firearms in use now, most are 303 rifles.

The meeting also approved a proposal of constructing buildings for outpatient and emergency department of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical College on a land at Parbaghat that is being illegally occupied at present.

To check stealing of electric transformers in rural areas, the meeting directed the law enforcers to take actions for stopping sale of stolen transformers.

Inventor

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where inventors and software designers struggle to gain an income for their ideas.

The first edition of the Bangla typing software popularly known as 'Bijoy' and Bangla keyboard known as the 'Bijoy Keyboard' was invented and patented by Mostafa Jabbarin 1988.

Camp said the US government is supportive of the present caretaker government and appreciates the reforms and other ongoing works.

He appreciated Bangladesh's initiatives to eliminate child labour from factories and called for ensuring workers rights.

The CA said the government is aware of the necessity of ensuring workers rights, saying a tripartite agreement has been signed among the government, industry and factory owners and workers.

About investment, Camp said investors have positive response to investment in Bangladesh.

The CA gave a brief description of the caretaker government's activities, including reforms, formulation of Right to Information Act, setting up of National Human Rights Commission and preparation of the voter list with photographs.

He said completion of the electoral roll with enrolment of 80 million voters will be a big achievement of this government.

The US official said the caretaker government is on the right track towards holding the stalled elections.

US Charge d' Affaires Geeta Pasi, Secretary to CA's Office Kazi M Aminul Islam and CA's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim were also present.

Allow indoor politics

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such issues are not possible if people cannot talk freely and emergency rules are not relaxed."

Awami League (AL) Presidium Member Suranjit Sengupta said, "We need to go to district, upazila and union levels for organisational reforms, but we cannot do so now. So, emergency should be relaxed and indoor politics allowed across the country."

He went on, "Besides, there is also an issue of getting many of the political leaders released from jails through legal procedures." Reforms are necessary not only for political parties' operations but also for the civil society, media, teachers and others, he said. "We all are responsible for where we are now."

AL leader Col (ret'd) Faruk Khan said the present government is responsible for delay in the reforms process since it is yet to withdraw the ban on indoor politics across the country (except Dhaka). "We have to go to grassroots levels to discuss the reform proposals we have prepared."

Mofazzal Karim, adviser to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, said politics must be reformed for a qualitative change. "People will reject all those who say reforms are not needed."

He said politicians should now change their mindset. Imposed reforms will not do, rather intra-party consensus is important for reforms. "Anyone can suggest reforms but none can compel political parties to go for this," he added.

Mofazzal pointed out that there are many faults in the BNP constitution, which should be changed. Use of black money in politics and sale of nominations for polls should be stopped, he added.

Inam Ahmed Chowdhury, another adviser to the BNP chairperson, said they feel that reforms are necessary to stop use of muscle power and black money and ensure accountability and democracy within political parties. But the number of pro-reform leaders appears to be coming down, he mentioned.

"It does not matter much whether the top leader is in or out of prison, reforms must be done for desired results," Inam said. It is unfortunate that the leaders opposing reforms now claim to be democrats, he

regretted. In his keynote paper, Shujon Secretary Dr Badiul Alam Majumder said the government and the Election Commission are going ahead as regards reforms but political parties are not coming forward ahead proactively. Rather, they are just demanding elections.

Elections are important but some key reforms must be made now for healthy democracy, he said, adding the parties should identify reform issues and suggest action plan and timeframe to accomplish the task.