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## Demand for poll date on parties' agenda as EC restarts talks today

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Election Commission (EC) begins today its second round of talks with political parties with the unresolved BNP issue remaining a barrier to finalising the electoral reform proposals, which in turn is delaying the proposed talks between the government itself and the parties.

The EC on November 5 of last year invited M Saifur Rahman-led faction of BNP to the first round of electoral reform dialogue with it on November 22, prompting Khandaker Delwar Hossain-led faction, loyal to detained Chairperson Khaleeda Zia, to challenge the commission's decision in the High Court (HC).

The matter is still pending in the

HC resulting in the EC's failure to hold yet the first round of talk with BNP.

The political parties, invited to join the second round of talks with the commission, are expected to demand a date for the next parliamentary election, and lifting of the state of emergency for creating an atmosphere conducive to holding the polls and to their pre-poll preparations.

On the first day of the second round of talks, the EC will sit separately with Bikalpadhara Bangladesh, Bangladesh Workers Party, and Samyabadi Dal in the EC Secretariat aiming to wrap up the dialogues with 15 parties in five days.

But the commission is most likely destined to fail in wrapping

up the talks on February 29 as it is still in a logjam regarding the BNP issue.

Since the matter has not been resolved yet, the EC has excluded BNP from the schedule of the second round of talks, although the chief election commissioner (CEC) has repeatedly been saying that the electoral reform proposals will not be finalised until the commission talks with the party fraught with factional feud.

Against such a backdrop, the proposed dialogues between the political parties and the caretaker government itself might get delayed as it is hinging upon the completion of EC's talks with them.

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed in his address to the nation

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1



A forklift takes a box of artefacts into the National Museum at Shabbagh in the capital yesterday after they were brought back to Dhaka from Guimet Museum in Paris.

## Artefacts finally back home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

All the 42 artefacts that the government had sent for an exhibition at Guimet Museum in Paris on December 1 last year were brought back home yesterday.

On completion of the customs formalities, the 10 boxes containing the relics were taken directly to the Bangladesh National Museum at 12 noon from the Zia International Airport (ZIA).

"The customs officials opened all the sealed boxes and checked the items at the airport in front of government-formed expert committee and the media," Director General of National Museum Samar Chandra Paul said. All the items returned safely, he added.

Cultural Affairs Adviser Rasheda K Chowdhury received the artefacts early in the morning when a cargo flight of Air France carrying the priceless relics touched down at the ZIA.

Officials concerned, including

Cultural Affairs Secretary Sharful Alam and representatives from ministries of home and international affairs were present at the time.

Under a cultural exchange agreement with France, the government dispatched the artefacts on December 1, 2007 despite protests from art connoisseurs. Of those, 14 were taken from Barind Research Museum, 10 from the National Museum and 18 from the museums of Mahasthangarh, Paharpur and Mainamati.

Sources working with the National Museum said that they got back their 10 items. These are-- Surya (black stone), Parnasavari (black stone), Gaja Lakshmi (black stone), Marici (black stone), Mahamaya (black stone), Heruka (black stone), Lokanatha (bronze), Nataraj (black stone), Bodhisattava (wood) and Inscription (black stone).

Names of the other artefacts

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5



Zunaed Siddiqui, top scorer of the first Test between Bangladesh and South Africa so far, here flicks one off his pads on way to scoring an unbeaten 64 on the second day at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

## Shahadat puts Tigers on top

SPORTS REPORTER

Young Shahadat Hossain rose to a height that no paceman of the country has reached before with a six-wicket burst as Bangladesh put South Africa on a knife-edge after the eventful second day's play of the first Test at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

His fantastic feat not only gave the hosts a first-innings lead against a team who won their previous four Tests by an innings but also gave the Tigers a third realistic chance to sniff a victory after similar situations in Multan in 2003 against Pakistan and at Fatullah two years ago over world beaters Australia.

And what added to that is an innings of authority by young opener Zunaed Siddiqui who accumulated an unbeaten 64 to stretch the overall lead to 147 with six second innings wickets intact.

In Multan, the Tigers grabbed a first innings lead of 106 runs. But a valiant century by captain Inzamamul Haq with the number 11 batsman saw the host side home. A similar scenario was revisited at Fatullah when captain Ricky Ponting snatched victory from the jaws of defeat despite conceding a firstinnings deficit of 158.

However, the situation here at the Sher-e-Bangla is altogether a different one as although being bowled out for a paltry 192 on the first day, Shahadat bowled with precision to earn a 22-run first innings lead.

Both Shahadat and Zunaed's efforts not only ensured the creditable lead but also extended the tally to a respectable stage as the Tigers recovered from early collapse to make 125 runs for four before the day's play was called off with three overs remaining due to bad light.

For records, it was only the sixth

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

## MONEY LAUNDERING

# New law on cards to recover assets abroad

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and PORIMOL PALMA

The government will soon promulgate a new anti-money laundering ordinance to confiscate and recover the assets siphoned out of the country.

Under the rule, the state or in some cases Bangladesh Bank (BB) will be able to sign memorandums of understanding, multilateral or bilateral contracts and conventions with other governments and organisations.

The law ministry has already vetted the draft prepared by the central bank and will send it for approval of the advisory council shortly, said sources.

If approved, the ordinance will allow the government to seek help from any country and assist investigative agencies to probe crimes linked to money laundering, confiscate laundered money and have

recourse to law.

Besides allowing collection or exchange of relevant documents, intelligence and witnesses to locate, freeze or confiscate the assets obtained and sent abroad illegally, the rule will enable the countries concerned to share those recovered.

According to the draft ordinance, upon requests from the BB, the courts here can order organisations concerned to comply with instructions of a foreign court to confiscate or return the laundered funds or assets to where they belong.

In reply to an investigation agency's application, the court can also order for attachment or freeze of the money at home and or abroad. "As a result, recovering smuggled money will become much easier," the ordinance reads.

Similarly, the government can request other countries to sign

contracts to implement orders of Bangladesh courts.

According to the draft ordinance, the courts will not take cognisance of any money laundering case without the sanction of Anti-Corruption Commission.

With the money laundering prevention rule in force, there will be no barrier for the central bank to seek cooperation from the financial intelligence units (FIUs) of other countries or provide them with similar support.

According to intelligence, huge sums have been siphoned off to Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States over the last few years.

But in absence of an appropriate anti-money laundering act, the government could not yet sign any deal with those countries to recover the money.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

## Gen Moeen goes to India today on 6-day visit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief of Army Staff General Moeen U Ahmed flies to India on a six-day visit today, seeking to boost military relations between the two neighbours.

The army chief was scheduled to visit India in January last year but deferred his tour plan several times due to domestic engagements.

Gen Moeen, the first Bangladesh army chief to visit India, is likely to meet President Pratibha Patil, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Defence Minister AK Anthony, National Security Adviser MK Narayanan and chiefs of the three forces.

Intelligence sharing, border security and connectivity will feature high in his high-level meetings in New Delhi. He is also likely to discuss the possibility of joint exercises, training assistance and arms exports.

While the issue of security-information exchange may top the

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

## Only Jamaat opposes EC plan for poll fund transparency

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami is the lone party that opposed the Election Commission's (EC) proposals aimed at ensuring accountability and transparency in collection and expenditure of election funds of political parties, reveals an EC report.

The party also opposed the EC's initiatives for providing people with the right to have information on political parties' polls expenditures, says the report based on the parties' views on the EC's proposals for electoral reforms.

Jamaat however proposed that the EC increase the ceiling of election expenditures of candidates in parliamentary polls to Tk 25 lakh each from Tk 5 lakh now, and also raise the proposed ceiling on donation to political parties.

Moreover, it opposed introduction of transparent ballot boxes while most of the parties demanded this, said the EC report prepared following the first round of its electoral reform talks with the parties held in between September and November last year.

The EC however did not entertain Jamaat objections to its pro-

posals to ensure fair polls, and retained those with some modifications in line with the suggestions of most parties.

On election expenses of parties, the EC proposal said all of them should properly maintain accounts of their collection of funds and expenditures for polls purposes. It also proposed that they should submit reports to it on their elections funds and expenditures.

The EC's other proposals say that all sorts of documents relating to polls expenditures of political parties and candidates will be posted on its website so that people can easily get the information.

"If any one is found to have concealed facts, the commission will recommend cancellation of his/her membership of parliament," an EC proposal says.

But Jamaat opposed the EC proposals. At the first round of electoral reform talks on October 25 last year, the party's delegation termed the proposals "unacceptable" and argued that implementation of these will create troubles in holding the poll. It also feared misuse of the provisions in the proposals.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

## Opponents vow to curb Musharraf's power

Pro-govt party won't obstruct coalition formation

AP, AFP, Islamabad

The leaders of Pakistan's main opposition party vowed yesterday to curtail some of President Pervez Musharraf's broad powers, including his right to dismiss parliament, following their sweeping win in recent elections.

They also mulled candidates for the next prime minister with a veteran politician reputed to be a consensus builder emerging as the favourite.

PPP leaders were considering various proposals in closed-door talks through the weekend. Though a final decision was not expected before Monday, PPP leaders indicated they would push to strip the president of the right to dismiss parliament.

"The participants ... vowed to work for the restoration of the parliamentary supremacy by undoing undemocratic provisions under which elected parliaments have been dismissed," the party said in a statement.

The head of state has the power to dissolve parliament under an article of the constitution first included under the late President Zia ul-Haq. The article was removed after Zia ul-Haq's death in 1988 but was reinstated under Musharraf, who seized power in a 1999 coup.

New government will likely name its choice for prime minister in early March, party officials said yesterday, as uncertainty surrounded the future of key US ally President Pervez Musharraf.

The two biggest parties to emerge after Monday's parliamentary election have been weighing their choice for premier after agreeing to form a coalition.

Officials from both parties said the frontrunner to be prime minister was Makhdoom Amin Fahim, the widely respected vice president of slain former premier Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

"There is an agreement that Fahim should be the parliamentary leader and candidate for PM but the announcement is unlikely to be made public before the parliament is convened into session, most probably in the first week of March," a senior PPP official, who did not want to be named, told AFP.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

## The Daily Star means business!

Tomorrow The Daily Star will launch a new four-page business section and expand its cultural and international news coverage in order to provide a more complete service to our growing readership.

The Bangladesh economy has been growing strongly for the past decade, with the country's private sector leading the way. From garments to construction, agriculture to pharmaceuticals, Bangladeshi businesses are playing a vital role in the development of the country.

Business will cover not only the large companies, but reach down to the tens of thousands of individuals and firms whose endeavours are shaping the economic landscape. It will be a forum for economic debate and a place where the real triumphs and problems of business are told. With colour, features and new voices, Star Business will be the indispensable meeting place for finance business and policy makers.

Star Arts and Entertainment will be expanded to two pages a day, giving more space to capture the country's vibrant cultural scene. International news coverage will also be increased.

EDITOR

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