

War criminals

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to the government for trying them," CEC ATM Shamsul Huda said yesterday during the second round of electoral reform talks initiated by the commission.

The CEC also suggested the political parties to raise the issues strongly with the caretaker government during their proposed dialogues with it. "I think, the government will begin the dialogues with political parties next month and it will invite the same parties that we invited," said the CEC.

The CEC told the dialoguing parties that the EC will also make recommendations to the government regarding some other crucial issues including article 70 of the constitution which has long been blamed for preventing lawmakers from playing their roles freely in the parliament, an increase in the number of parliamentary seats, and introduction of a bicameral parliament.

About the EC's jurisdiction to make such recommendations, the CEC said the commission has the right to make recommendations to the government, being a constitutional body for holding free and fair elections to sustain democracy.

"Wrapping up the talks with the parties, we will prepare a comprehensive report summarising the outcomes of the talks. We will incorporate our recommendations in the report," Huda said adding, "I think, the government will consider the recommendations in due time."

In the first round of talks which was held between September and November of last year, most of the participating political parties demanded disqualification of war criminals from contesting in polls.

Apart from the political parties, veteran freedom fighters, family members of martyrs, and a large number of conscious citizens also have been urging the caretaker government, through the year of its stay in power, to try the war criminals.

In response to the rising demand, the CEC on September 16 of last year at a meeting with a political party said although the war criminals should have been tried immediately after the country's independence, all successive governments refrained from trying the anti-liberation forces.

The current caretaker government also seems to follow the footsteps of the previous governments regarding the issue although the chief adviser earlier said the war criminals' contest in elections will be unvoted.

PARTIES' RECOMMENDATIONS
On the first day of the second round of electoral reform talks, the EC yesterday sat with Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh, Samyabadi Dal, and the Workers Party of Bangladesh, separately in the EC Secretariat conference room.

Participating in the talks, Workers Party and Samyabadi Dal urged the EC to announce a specific date for the parliamentary election after wrapping up the talks, and not to hold polls to any local government before the national election.

Both the parties also urged the government to lift the state of emergency immediately and to try the war criminals in special tribunals.

About trials of the war criminals, Workers Party President Rashed

Criminal courts

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district and sessions judge's courts in the region, but that has yet to be implemented.

Meanwhile, the High Court yesterday directed the government to set up civil and criminal courts run by judicial officers in the CHT within a year to implement the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation (Amendment) Act, 2003.

It also ordered the government to establish tribunals for preventing repression on women and children in the three hill districts within the same period.

Earlier in the day, Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh placed a set of recommendations to the EC for reducing poll expenditures.

EC'S REPLIES

Accompanied by two other election commissioners -- Muhammed Sohul Hussain and Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhawat Hussain -- the CEC explained the commission's positions on different issues raised by the parties at the talks.

Informing the parties about the progress of voter listing, CEC Huda said half of the task of preparing a voter list with photographs is scheduled to be completed by the 28th of this month.

"Registration of eight crore voters will be completed by February 28. We are now confident that the voter list will be ready by October," the CEC assured the political parties, reiterating that the stalled parliamentary election will be held before the year end.

Saying that the voter list will be ready by October, the CEC sought opinions from the parties regarding a timetable for holding the stalled ninth parliamentary election.

In response, Samyabadi Dal and Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh said the poll should be held in early December. Workers Party however said they want the poll as soon as possible.

Responding to the political parties' demand for lifting the state of emergency, the CEC reiterated that the government must lift or relax the emergency regime to create an environment conducive to holding the polls. "We already asked the chief adviser to create an atmosphere where candidates may campaign for votes freely," he added.

In defence of the EC's plan to hold the polls to four city corporations and seven municipalities in April, the CEC said the commission decided to hold polls to some local government bodies as a pilot project, hoping that will boost its confidence.

"But the polls to those local government bodies will in no way hamper the preparations for holding the parliamentary election on time," the CEC said.

Responding to the parties' claim that in the past when democracy was suspended in the country, erstwhile military governments tended to hold local government elections prior to parliamentary elections in a bid to ensure their cohorts' majority in the parliament, Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhawat Hussain said, "If the midnight riders lay a siege to us, then we won't be able to do anything!"

Amnesty League, Jatiya Party (Ershad), and the Communist Party of Bangladesh are scheduled to hold talks with the EC today.

Job remains half-done

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pending with either finance or establishment ministries.

Of them, 157 were supposed to be recruited in the proposed Traffic, Driving and Peacekeeping School, 363 in Armed Police Battalion (APBN) and Specialised Training Centre and 283 in the Police Academy.

Of the 6,705 to be recruited in 2007-08 FY, files for recruiting 5,431 remained apparently unmoved in the establishment and finance ministries, the source added.

Referring to the finance division's inability to create the 157 posts on August 29 last year, a top police official commented: "It's audacity. Being a civil servant no-one can express inability to give approval to a government decision."

The official said the police headquarters in a letter raised an argument on the importance of the proposed school and made reply to some "wrong" arguments raised by the finance ministry in favour of its decision.

"The HQ also reminded the ministry that expressing inability to create necessary posts might go against the government decision. Even then it again expressed its inability," said the official.

The salient feature of the proposed organogram of police, made for restructuring the organisational structure of Bangladesh police, was presented at the 36th cabinet committee meeting on law and order on May 22, 2006.

The secretaries of all ministries concerned attended the meeting as members of the committee.

Around 3,500 criminal cases filed by hills people since independence till 2006 remain pending with the Chittagong courts, said sources.

In the CHT Regulation 1900, a three-tier social court headed by three hill circle chiefs (or king) and their subordinate headman and Karbari is mandated to resolve only some family conflicts in the ethnic communities.

Locals have to go to Chittagong also to appeal the DCs' judgments.

"A person from Chhoto Harina (Borkol upazila) in Rangamati needs at least five days to return home after attending a hearing in the Divisional Commissioner's court in Chittagong," said Pampu Protim Roy, president of Rangamati Bar Association.

The person might need to stay even longer in the port city if the court concerned for some reasons fails to sit on schedule.

People have long been calling for the governments to introduce civil and sessions courts to the region.

"Running the judiciary with executive officials goes against the spirit of the judgment in the historic judiciary separation case," said Pampu, going on to term it contemptuous.

Mizanur Rahman, a law professor at Dhaka University, observed that the practices run counter to the 1997 CHT peace treaty as well.

At the Wednesday's meeting, Hassan Arif told the CHT lawyers that the government would act to have necessary amendments to the law to introduce civil courts, Pampu said.

"Though the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation (Amendment) Act, 2003 has a provision of introducing district judge, it does not say who will be the appellate and revision authority," he said.

The section [of the 2003 amendment] that says the government shall appoint judges too needs to be amended, he noted.

The same day the SC registrar spoke of the temporary arrangement when the delegation met him at his office.

Price control

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be rational," the commerce adviser said.

He said he was trying to set up a dedicated price monitoring cell under the commerce ministry as soon as possible.

The government would try to make a move to rationalise the prices of nine essential items in the 'core food basket' through discussion with the importers and traders and they convened today's meeting for the purpose, he added.

National Board of Revenue Chairman Mohammed Abdul Mazid, Bangladesh Bank Deputy Governor Ziaul Hassan Siddiqui and Bangladesh Rifles Director General Maj Gen Shafiq Ahmed, among others, were present.

Sloan

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attended dinner with lawyers, gave interviews to private media and also held meetings with politicians as well as university teachers though he was asked not to engage in such activities," said the release.

A foreign tourist could deliver speech on a country's political and sub judice matters. "For that reason, the government did not allow Sloan to arrange press conference on February 22 at Sonargaon Hotel."

During his visit, the HR jurist had spoken about the political detainees here, including former prime ministers Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia.

"You cannot impeach him right now because you don't have two-thirds majority in the National Assembly and the Senate. Since we cannot do it now, there is no need to say anything about it," Babar said.

Sharif has been pressuring for Musharraf's ouster, the PPP is more coy on its plans for the president, whose popularity has slumped as basic commodity prices soar and Islamist violence intensifies.

Omar said the opposition victory was also thanks to the Taliban's activities "by giving their blood and as a result of which people rejected US and Musharraf policies and gave victory to their opposing political forces."

Omar sporadically speaks to journalists by telephone saying he is a spokesman for Islamist Taliban groups operating in the region. There is no way to independently verify his claim.

JP (Manju)

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professional bodies," Sheikh Shahidul Islam, secretary general of the party, said.

He was addressing a press briefing at a city hotel.

The JP secretary general said that they do not want Jamaat to be included in their proposed national government since they are anti-liberation war forces.

The leaders of the party observed that a national government is also necessary to run the country efficiently.

"Prices of essentials are very high at present, the government alone could not handle the situation," Shahidul Islam said, adding that a national government will be able to control the situation.

He also urged the Election Commission (EC) to declare a specific date for election and to clear people's confusion regarding the polls.

Shahidul Islam asked the government to lift ban on indoor politics and allow the political parties to finalise their reforms.

The JP secretary general also urged the EC to hold the elections to the city corporations, paurashavas and union parishes for creating the atmosphere for the national election.

The party will place its election-related demands to the EC during the dialogue with it on February 27.

JP presidium members Abdur Rahim, Shah Rafiqul Bari Chowdhury, Amena Bari, Col (retd) Abdul Latif Mallik and Azam Khan were present at the press briefing among others.

Hannan Shah

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return to the mainstream," he said.

When contacted pro-reform leader Maj Gen (retd) ZA Khan, who is also an adviser to the BNP chairperson, said he would welcome and join Shah in his efforts for unity. Stepping several steps ahead towards unity Khan said the decisions of October 29 standing committee meeting chaired by Saifur Rahman at his house can be scrapped through discussion.

"We are ready to rescind any decision for the sake of unity. Let us sit first for talks. Everything can be decided through discussion," he said.

"I don't see unity as too difficult if we sit together. We want the unity as early as possible for we want to participate in the election 'unitely,'" he added.

BNP was split when Chairperson Khaleda Zia sacked Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and appointed Khandaker Delwar Hossain as secretary general just before she was taken into custody in September last year. Her unilateral decision without consulting deepened the crisis in BNP.

BNP standing committee meeting on September 29 announced Saifur Rahman as acting chairperson and Maj (retd) Hafizuddin Ahmed as acting secretary general of the party.

This was not accepted by Khaleda Zia who remained firm in her decision of keeping Khandaker Delwar Hossain as secretary general.

Dhaka-Kolkata

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may construct a box-type temporary fencing from zero point along the railway of the respective territories on a mutually agreed drawing and design."

It adds: "The arrangement made under the provision shall not be used or quoted as reference for any other situation of similar nature or other purposes, including strategic or defence."

The agreement on running passenger trains between Bangladesh and India was signed in July 2001 in Dhaka for three years. The agreement was not renewed on time, but later it was extended up to July 11, 2010.

Recently, two decorated trains from the two sides had moved across the border on inaugural run.

Gen Moeen

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will call on West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee in Kolkata. He is scheduled to return on March 1.

Gen Moeen left Dhaka for New Delhi on board a Jet Air flight at 12:05 pm, nearly three hours behind the schedule as the aircraft landing was delayed at Zia International Airport.

The army chief was scheduled to visit India last year but had to postpone the trip due to domestic engagements.

"You know, no matter what happens in this contest -- and I am honoured, I am honoured to be here with Barack Obama. I am absolutely honoured... We're going to be fine."

Wolfson explained that the exchange showed "why Hillary Clinton is the next president of the United States... Her strength, her life experience, her compassion. She's tested and ready."

The next crucial nominating contests are in Ohio (141 delegates) and Texas (193 delegates) -- states that even her husband, former president Bill Clinton, had admitted are key to her campaign's survival.

Polls released this week have suggested Obama and Clinton are in a dead heat in Texas. RealClearPolitics' average of Ohio polls, however, has Clinton at 50 percent and Obama at 42 percent.

Youngone started its operation in Bangladesh back in 1978 and grew into a massive company with exports standing close to \$300 million a year.

Iran vows reprisals

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baseless," ISNA news agency reported.

The UN watchdog said it had made "quite good progress" in its long-running probe into Iran's contested nuclear drive, but that Tehran was still defying UN demands to halt uranium enrichment.

The IAEA also complained that Iran had begun development of new generation centrifuges for uranium enrichment -- the process which can make nuclear fuel or, in highly extended form, the fissile core of an atomic bomb.

Israel, the sole if undeclared nuclear-armed state in the Middle East, meanwhile said it supports new sanctions on Iran which it views as its greatest threat.

"The fact that the International Atomic Energy Agency admits in its report that it was not able to determine the true nature of the Iranian nuclear programme is very serious," Israeli government spokesman Avi Pazner said.

Sheikh Helal

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wealth illegally and fined him Tk 50 lakh, in default of which he would have to suffer two more years in jail.

He received another three years' jail for concealing information in the wealth statement submitted to the ACC.

On September 24 last year, ACC Deputy Director Manzur Ahmed filed the case with the Ramna Police Station accusing Helal and his wife of concealing Tk 7,600 crore in their wealth statements and amassing Tk 16,22 crore through illegal means.

Bur Iran's government spokesman Ghulam Hossein Elham said it was "illegal and unjustifiable to keep Iran's nuclear case at the Security Council," vowing that "it will not affect the country's will" to pursue its nuclear programme.

Iran

is already under two sets of UN Security Council sanctions for its failure to heed repeated Security Council ultimatums to suspend uranium enrichment.

It insists that as a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty it has a right to make enriched fuel to meet its population's growing energy needs.

The IAEA said nearly all of the key issues agreed in the so-called "work plan" drawn up by the UN watchdog and Tehran last autumn had been

Hillary turns up

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some of his aides suspected improper conduct between the Arizona senator and a younger female lobbyist.

McCain, who with 976 delegates compared to nearest rival Mike Huckabee's 245 looks set to capture his party's nomination, refused to answer any more questions on the topic Friday, after denying any wrongdoing in his campaign.