

Jamaat fires broadside

FROM PAGE 1
second round of talks told some of the parties that it will make a recommendation to the government for trying the war criminals.

Earlier, the commission incorporated in its electoral reform proposal a provision for disqualifying any convicted war criminal from contesting in any election.

Yesterday morning at a bilateral dialogue with Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Jm), the EC made a new promise for making another recommendation to the government regarding disqualifying anti-liberation organisations from contesting in parliamentary elections, considering a majority of participating parties' demand for it.

Launching a broadside against the EC during the bilateral talk between the commission and Jamaat in the afternoon, the latter also termed as 'disgusting' the demand of the participating parties for not to register Jamaat as a parliamentary party labelling it as an anti-liberation force.

It also claimed that the accusations against it are completely imaginary.

In the written statement submitted to the EC, it said, "The Election Commission's neutrality will become questionable if it takes any step or make any recommendation giving credence to their motivated demands."

Jamaat's delegation led by its Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahid also said in the EC's pattern of inviting parties to the talks it is evident that it has a bias against Islamic political parties while favouring some parties which are 'anti-religion'.

The Jamaat secretary general, who on October 25 said his party did not work against the liberation war in 1971, and claimed that there is no war criminal in the country, however declined to comment yesterday on an EC proposal for barring convicted war criminals from contesting in polls.

Emerging from the talk, Mojahid left the EC Secretariat premises hurriedly avoiding questions from journalists.

EC'S REPLIES
In response to Jamaat's angry accusations, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda categorically rebutted the allegations explaining EC's positions on the issues.

About making recommendations to the government, Huda said the EC has never stepped beyond its jurisdiction. "I beg to differ with you. It is well within our jurisdiction to make recommendations to the government on issues related to ensuring free, fair and credible elections," the CEC replied with examples from the Indian EC's similar practices.

He said the CEC of India made 58 recommendations to the current prime minister of that country including recommendations for amending the constitution and regarding the cabinet.

Since the beginning of the second round of talks on Sunday, the CEC has been saying that the EC will make recommendations to the government regarding Article 70 of the constitution, trials of war criminals, increasing the number of parliamentary seats, and about introducing a bicameral parliament.

In response to Jamaat's allegation that the EC did not invite many Islamic parties despite their representation in previous parliaments, the CEC said the commission

wanted to accommodate as many parties as possible and they also relaxed the criteria for invitation for that.

"It is not at all correct that we did not invite Islamic political parties," the CEC said.

As the Jamaat secretary general claimed that Khelafat Majlis could have been invited since, according to him, the party had representatives in a past parliament, the CEC said the commission deliberated on the issue after receiving a letter from Khelafat expressing its desire to join the talks.

"But the party neither had any representation in any parliament nor did it obtain even two percent of votes in any election since 1973," quipped Huda.

In response to another Jamaat leader's demand for inviting Muslim League (Jamir), Election Commissioner Sakhawati said they could not even locate the whereabouts of the party despite sincere efforts.

Echoing Sakhawati the CEC said officials of the EC Secretariat could not even find any official address of the party. Party leaders, who had communicated with the EC, also had not left any address with it.

"Perhaps, some people are hesitant to give out their addresses," the CEC quipped again.

Responding to Jamaat's accusation that the EC invited all factions of some parties while neglecting many Islamic parties with factions, Huda said all invited factions of parties had representations in past parliaments.

"We thought about inviting the factions of some Islamic political parties, but we could not do so since they did not have any representation in any parliament," Huda retorted.

Jamaat leaders also blasted the EC for incorporating in its electoral reform proposals a provision for disqualifying any political party from getting registered with it as a parliamentary party if there is discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, or language.

Joining the first round of electoral reform talks on October 25 of last year, Jamaat suggested the EC to omit the word 'religion' from the proposed provision, but the commission did not keep the request in its revised proposal.

"You have put the word religion in the proposal. It's an ultra violation of the constitution," Jamaat leader Barrister Abdur Razzak charged the EC yesterday.

"Some political parties, who do not represent the people and are against religion, supplied the language for the proposal," Razzak claimed alluding to some left leaning parties.

Election Commissioner Muhammad Sohul Hussain replied the EC did nothing more than incorporating a provision from the constitution itself.

About discrimination on grounds of religion, etc, Article 28 (1) of the constitution says the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.

Election Commissioner Sakhawati told Jamaat leader Razzak, "More or less you are accusing the EC, which is not right. What are you afraid of?"

Razzak said the question of registering Islamic political parties had never been raised before. "Then why

the question is being raised now?" he asked.

The Jamaat leaders however said if the word 'religion' exists in the provision in question in the proposal, somebody might interpret it in future as -- political parties based on religion are not allowed to be registered with the EC as parliamentary parties.

Jamaat leader Razzak said the EC could have invited both factions of BNP to the talks.

In a quick retort to his comment, the CEC said, "You are making dangerous remarks! Who am I to recognise factions in a party when both sides are claiming that the party has not been divided?"

In reply to a Jamaat leader's query on why the EC invited Saifur-led faction of BNP and not the faction led by BNP chairperson nominated secretary general, the CEC said he would rather not comment on it since the matter is sub-judice.

"We examined BNP's constitution and our findings are not going to be very pleasant for the party leadership. We will disclose our findings later in a news conference to tell all why the commission did not invite the BNP chairperson nominated secretary general to the talks," Huda said.

Jamaat asked the EC to announce a specific date for the ninth parliamentary election, and not to hold polls to any local government before holding the national election. It also demanded lifting of restrictions on indoor politics at district and upazila levels.

Earlier in the day, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Jm) and National Awami Party raised the demands for barring anti-liberation political parties from contesting in polls, and not to register Jamaat as a parliamentary party.

So far, nine political parties joined the second round of electoral reform talks, and Jamaat is the only party among those to denounce the EC.

About the doubts in public mind over holding the parliamentary poll according to the electoral roadmap, the CEC told the parties that the EC decided not to respond to questions regarding the matter in the future. "We have spoken a lot about it. Those who like to revel in doubts, let them do so. We have no doubt in our minds about holding the polls according to the roadmap," the CEC asserted.

Babar blames

FROM PAGE 1
League rally in 2004, Babar spontaneously told the interrogators that he did not concoct the Joj/Mian story.

The Joj/Mian story was cooked up on the instructions of former CID officials Ruhul Amin and Munshi Atiqur Rahman, the source quoted Babar as saying.

When the CID members told Babar that they were interrogating him for the Sabir murder case, not the August 21 grenade attack case, Babar said that they should hear him out as the CID is also investigating the August 21 grenade attack case.

In an attempt to evade responsibility, Babar claimed that Harkatul Jihad Al Islami leader Mufti Abdul Hannan was arrested at his directive and he also ordered to arrest Moulana Tajuddin, but Tajuddin could not be arrested as his brother, former deputy minister Abdus Salam Pintu, sent him abroad.

Babar was arrested on May 28 last year and has already been sentenced to 17 years imprisonment in an arms case. He was admitted to the BSMU on December 29 with various ailments including asthma.

7th Wage Board

FROM PAGE 16
recommendations to the government within two months, said an official announcement.

The members of the board are Prothom Alo Editor Matiur Rahman, Jugantor Editor Golam Sarwar, Independent Editor and Publisher Mahubul Alam, BSS Managing Director and Chief Editor Jagul Ahmed Chowdhury, Sangbadik-Sramik-Karmachari Ojika Parishad co-convenor Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul, its member-secretary Ruhul Amin Gazi, and members Abdul Hashem and Khairul Islam.

Deputy secretary (Law and Order) of the Ministry of Information Khurshid Alam was made secretary of the board. As per its terms of reference, the newly constituted wage board will review the Sixth Wage Board Award for announcement of the seventh wage board award in consultation with all parties concerned, aiming to remove anomalies in salaries and allowances of the journalists, employees and press workers.

The board will make recommendations after discussion with all concerned for taking measures against those newspapers that will not implement the government-announced wage board award.

The board will also recommend whether those newspapers that will not implement the wage board award would get zero tariff facility in newspaper import and other facilities, including advertisement.

Earlier, the government had approved the final recommendations of the Sixth Wage Board Award relating to salaries, allowances and other benefits for the journalists, employees and press workers on December 6, 2007. But the journalists, employees and press workers rejected the award.

US advises Sharif

FROM PAGE 16
not become part of the federal Cabinet as we do not want to take oath under the administration of President (Pervez) Musharraf."

Sharif briefed Patterson about his party's agenda, including the restoration of the pre-emergency status of the judiciary, supremacy of parliament and strengthening of democracy during the meeting at the Frontier House.

It was part of a series of meetings between Western envoys and leaders of parties that are set to form the new government.

Patterson congratulated Sharif on the victory of his party in the February 18 general election. The PML-N is set to form a coalition government with the Pakistan People's Party, which emerged the largest group in the polls.

"Through the electoral process, the Pakistani people have expressed their views and we respect their choices," Patterson said. "We are ready to work with whatever coalition is formed. It is up to those elected to form a government."

Patterson reiterated US President George Bush's commitment to democracy in Pakistan. She informed Sharif about the "US's shared interests with Pakistan" and continuing economic assistance and military cooperation.

"We wish to continue working together, advancing our common agenda of improving the lives of the Pakistani people through development assistance and continuing our joint efforts to improve Pakistan's ability to enhance its own security," she said.

Western envoys have stepped up contacts with leaders of the PPP and PML-N to ensure a smooth transition of power after the opposition parties swept the polls and to shore up the position of President Pervez Musharraf, whose supporters were

Barapukuria coal mine

FROM PAGE 1
(FIR), he also brought allegations of misappropriation of government money, cheating for concealing identity by Moazzem Hossain and abusing power for personal gains.

Of the other two cases against the BNP chief detained since September 3, one was filed for graft regarding gas exploration job by Niko and the other for violating tender conditions in appointing Gato, an indenting house, for container handling in Dhaka inland container depot and Chittagong portyard.

CASE STATEMENT
Shandong Ludi Consortium was adjudged the lowest bidder in the international tender floated to employ a contractor for production, management and maintenance of Barapukuria coal mine in Dinajpur.

A seven-member committee headed by Prof Anwarul Azim, a teacher of Buet and president of Institute of Engineers, Bangladesh, was the evaluation authority.

Of the three bidders, Saju Coal Mining Group Consortium was the second lowest bidder while China National Machinery Import and Export Corporation (CMC) consortium the highest.

Following recommendation of the government committee on purchase and approval of the prime minister, a deed for the work worth Tk 335.08 crore was signed between the Barapukuria Coal Mining Company Ltd and Shandong Ludi Consortium on April 24, 2004.

Instead of submitting bank guarantee and performance guarantee as per the rules, Shandong came up with conditions irrelevant to the deed. Among others, they proposed raising the contract value.

Though legally there was no room for allowing anything beyond the deed, the energy and mineral resources ministry suggested that Petrobangla examine the proposals from Shandong, leading to delay.

The government did not go for a retender on grounds that there was not enough time for that.

Following manoeuvrings in favour of CMC, it cut a deal with the Chinese company on June 4, 2005, 14 months into the deal with Shandong.

According to tender rules and Public Procurement Regulations 2003, the second lowest bidder, in that case Saju, was supposed to be given the job. But the deal went to

CMC whose offer was over Tk 158 crore higher than Shandong's.

Though Saju's bid was cancelled for not renewing its bid bond, the company was later shown as an associate of CMC in the contract.

Khaleda Zia has been included as the accused as she was responsible for the ministry in question and any decision was supposed to be taken with her full knowledge.

Besides, the FIR says, she approved the cabinet purchase committee's proposal without considering the difference of over Tk 158 crore between the highest and lowest bidders and ignoring prospect of retender.

Hosaf Group did not participate in the bidding directly, they were the local agents of both the lowest and highest bidding companies. In fact, the Chinese companies worked in collaboration with each other throughout the tender and Hosaf group Chairman Moazzem Hossain who was their common chairman used his connections to pull off the deal, the FIR read.

REACTIONS
Terming the case false and motivated, Pro-Khaleda BNP faction yesterday demanded immediate release of the former premier and withdrawal of all cases against her.

Talking to The Daily Star, party's acting office secretary Ruhul Kabir Rizvi said, "The case has been filed only to lengthen our chairperson's stay in jail."

Contacted, MK Anwar and Shamsul Islam, who are among the accused, declined to make any comment.

"I don't know anything about it," Shamsul Islam said.

Maj (ret) Hafiz Uddin Ahmed, acting secretary general of pro-Saifur faction, described the latest graft case against Khaleda and the former ministers as 'regrettable'. He said he hopes they will get justice.

Meanwhile, Jamaat-e-Islami said the case against its Amir Motiur Rahman Nizami and Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mojahid is motivated.

A party press release signed by Tasnee Alam said the case against the 11 top political leaders would disrupt the electoral process and get in the way of restoration of democracy.

The press release was issued after a central working committee meeting with Nizami in the chair.

A mine of corruption

FROM PAGE 1
million tonnes. And the cost of coal production per tonne was estimated at \$35 but now it is around \$90. Plus, the project is more than eight years behind schedule.

All this happened to ensure "business" for certain individuals.

From last year, the government however is trying to revamp the mine project with help from the Chinese government.

While this sketchily made deal imposed a huge financial burden on the government, the authorities could never ensure proper monitoring of the project implementation as Hosaf group -- a close ally of the two BNP governments -- acted as representative of the project's Chinese developer CMEC and also of British consultant IMCL.

Owned by Moazzem Hossain -- one of the accused in the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) case -- Hosaf also represented the developer of over-priced 250 megawatt malfunctioning coal-fired power plant.

Interestingly, Hosaf also represented in one way or another all the three Chinese companies that participated in the 2003 tender for production, management and maintenance of Barapukuria coal mine, in which the ACC detected corruption.

The seeds of corruption in this project was sown in the nineties. The Daily Star investigation into how the project was devised found that policymakers had asked offi-

cial to tamper with economic basis of the mine to show it as a profitable project.

The then energy minister Khondker Mosharraf Hossain worked specially hard for this project while Hosaf mediated negotiation on the flawed Supplier's Credit from China.

Sources say a senior BNP policymaker was bribed Tk 30 crore in the early nineties for the deal.

The mine project was supposed to be completed before 2000 but till 2004, the CMEC could not do so.

As the original contract did not ensure transfer of the mine's Chinese technology to Bangladesh, the government had to assign a Chinese company to run it. Once again, Hosaf played a role in the tender in 2003. In 2004, the cabinet purchase committee awarded this contract to Shandong Ludi Consortium of China as the lowest bidder.

Represented by Hosaf, Shandong later asked for cost escalation and the government then gave the project to CMEC -- the third lowest bidder -- by skipping the second.

The Enec approved Barapukuria project proposal in March 1992 with the target of completing it on July 31, 2001 at a cost of Tk 887 crore. But the project was suspended when sub-soil waters started gushing in at a rate of 700 cubic metre from April 5, 1998 at a depth of 1,100 feet. This happened because of design flaws, according to official sources.

US advises Sharif

FROM PAGE 16
routed in the elections.

Sharif told reporters that Pakistan attaches "great importance to its relations with the US." The PML-N condemned "all kinds of terrorist activities but was of the view that negotiations provided a means to address the causes of terrorism and find a solution instead of relying on force alone," he said.

He said if Pakistan could hold talks with India to resolve long-standing disputes, there was no reason not to engage in a dialogue with those involved in terrorist activities.

Sharif said the PML-N "gives full respect to the mandate for the PPP to form government in the centre." The PPP would also support the PML-N to form government in Punjab province, he added.

Earlier, Sharif also met the British and French envoys and exchanged views about the formation of a new government. British High Commissioner Robert Brinkley met Sharif and discussed the formation of the new government and the prospects of alliances between different political parties.

Senior PML-N leader Chaudhry Nisar Ali accompanied Sharif for the meeting. Later, Sharif visited the French embassy and held talks with the ambassador. PML-N sources described the meeting as informal.

Sharif and Pakistan People's Party co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari said they would form governments at the centre and in the country's four provinces. They also vowed to strengthen democracy and to work for the reinstatement of judges who were sacked by President Pervez Musharraf during last year's Emergency rule.

Shortly after the PPP emerged the largest party in Monday's general election, Zardari went to the US embassy to meet Ambassador Anne Patterson for talks on the emerging political scenario.

Yunus

FROM PAGE 1
visiting the Gulf country as a speaker at Ninth Jeddah Economic Forum now being held in Jeddah and plans to introduce Grameen Bank's signature microcredit concept in the country, urged the Bangladeshi expatriates to abide by Saudi rules and regulations.

"Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh have strong economic and cultural ties and Saudi Arabia has been a great friend of us in all circumstances," he said, noting that Bangladesh is a source of hard-working manpower for the kingdom.

Meanwhile, Dr Yunus' presence in the kingdom and his great speeches at Jeddah International Conference and Exhibition Centre received a big round of applause, making Bangladeshi expatriates proud.

Maintenance workers Mukles Mian, Muhammad Munir and Jamshuddin said they were overwhelmed by the greatness of their countryman.

"Look, how all the Saudi men and women were clapping and listening to him with rapt attention. He is a great man. We are seeing him for the first time in flesh and blood," daily Arab News yesterday quoted one of them as saying.

The three men said Dr Yunus' presence in Saudi Arabia comes at the most critical time in the lives of the 17 lakh Bangladeshi expatriates in the kingdom.

"There are all these reports appearing in the local press about our iqamas (work permits) not being renewed and about recruitment of Bangladeshis being stopped and of our compatriots being in the news for all the wrong reasons," he said.

"There are websites that are running a campaign against us. Professor Yunus' presence here will go a long way in improving the image of Bangladeshis in Saudi Arabia. All the top Saudi business leaders are here and after listening to Professor Yunus they will definitely have a soft corner for all of us. When they think of Bangladeshis, the Saudis will now definitely think of Professor Yunus."

For the three workmen, the presence of Dr Yunus was enough. "We don't know what he spoke about," said one of them. "We don't know English. We only saw the entire hall clapping intermittently and we saw that everybody stood at the end for quite a long time. Did you see anybody doing that when other speakers ended their speeches?"

EC starts
FROM PAGE 1
The Jamaat, however, vehemently opposed introduction of clear ballot boxes in the polls and said that it preferred the use of traditional ballot boxes made of steel.

As most of the political parties participated in the electoral reform talks had demanded using transparent ballot boxes, the EC is considering the matter actively.

When the CEC asked Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahid why his party is opposing it, the Jamaat leader replied that purchasing of transparent ballot boxes would require a huge amount of money.

"Besides, being an independent country, we should not depend on foreign countries for transparent ballot boxes," Mojahid argued.

At this point, Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret) M Sakhawati Hussain informed the Jamaat leaders that the EC is trying to collect the ballot boxes free of charge.

"Transparent ballot boxes will be used in the next parliamentary election if we can collect those on time. If not, traditional ballot boxes of steel would be used," Sakhawati added.

LGRD ministry

FROM PAGE 16
He admitted that there are some instances where construction work stopped after the contractors were arrested during the anti-corruption drive.

"After the back to back flooding, brick kilns, which generally start production by November, could not do so before the last week of December last year," he said giving another reason.

Meanwhile, the LGRD ministry has submitted three new proposals involving Tk 530 crore to the Planning Commission on road repair and building sheds for farmers in local markets. "After studying the feasibility that we can complete the projects within this fiscal year, we've submitted these proposals and are waiting for Enec's decision," Anwarul Iqbal said.

Under one project, some run-down roads in each upazila will be repaired fully, 'not partially', he said.

The ministry will build special sheds for farmers at the existing markets in each of the 4,498 union parishads (UPs) under another project involving Tk 20 crore. Taka 10 lakh will be spent for building sheds in each market.

"Separate enclosures for women farmers will be there at the markets so that they can sell their agricultural products at just price in an atmosphere free from extortion," Iqbal said.

The third project involving Tk 53 crore is on repair of local roads with soil, employing women workers.

The main objective of this project is creating jobs for women, he said. Wage has been proposed to be raised to Tk 90 from Tk 54.

Gen Moeen meets

FROM PAGE 1
Minister Manmohan Singh, Defence Minister AK Antony and National Security Adviser M K Narayanan.

Moeen left Delhi yesterday morning to visit the Indian Military Academy at Dehra Dun in Uttaranchal Pradesh after 'fruitful' discussions with India's top political and military leaders.

From Dehra Dun, Moeen is scheduled to visit the Taj Mahal in Agra, the Ajmer Sharif shrine and then the coastal state of Goa. He would then visit Kolkata on January 29.

In Kolkata Moeen is scheduled to visit the Eastern Command of the Indian Army and hold a meeting with Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya and discussions on starting India-Bangladesh train service. He has also expressed his desire to visit the Shantiniketan.

A top official of the Indian foreign ministry said bilateral talks between the Bangladesh Army chief and top Indian political and military leaders would build up the momentum for better relations between the two countries.

"We attach a lot of importance to Gen Moeen's visit, which would shape bilateral ties during the coming days," he told The Daily Star.

Gen Moeen, who is on a six-day visit to the neighbouring country, said on Monday that he expects the Dhaka-Kolkata train service to start in next two-three months.

Moeen also met India's Minister of State for Commerce Jairam Ramesh on Monday and discussed various possibilities to further improve trade and commerce between India and Bangladesh.

He was informed that the final notification on the duty-free export of 8 million pieces of readymade garments from Bangladesh would be issued soon.

Gen Moeen and Gen Kapoor held extensive discussions on the possible ways for further promoting cooperation between the armed forces of the two countries in areas including training, sharing of experience in disaster management, advanced information sharing on floods and tsunami and participation of troops of the two countries in the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations.

Gen Moeen also held discussions with the Indian Minister of State for Defence MM Pallam Raju where ideas regarding training of armed forces personnel at each other's training institutions, capacity building in the area of specialised treatment at medical institutions, sharing of experience on disaster management and greater interaction on matters relating to participation of the troops of the two countries in UN Peacekeeping Operations came up.

Gen Moeen's visit is the first by any Bangladeshi Army chief. The Indian Army chief visited Bangladesh in 2001.

Moeen is being accompanied by his wife and General Officer Commanding (GOC) of 66 Infantry Division Major General Syed Fatemil Ahmed Rumi and Director (Training) of Army Headquarters Brigadier General Md Anisuzzaman Bhuiyan.

THE HINDU REPORT
The decision to honour the martyred Indian Army soldiers is expected to contribute even more to the desire between both sides to rid of acrimony in their bilateral relationship, The Hindu said.

The series of high-level meetings chalked out for Moeen indicates that New Delhi is willing to do business with whoever is in power in Dhaka, The Hindu said.

India is keen to improve ties with Bangladesh to an extent that it gets transit rights for its goods to the northeast and the Chittagong Port as well as a commitment on transit of gas from Myanmar and, possibly, the northeastern states.

For the immediate future, it favours a commitment from the Bangladesh Army chief to clamp down on anti-India militants perceived to be camping on the Bangladeshi territory.

The need to reduce tensions on the Indo-Bangla border will figure in the discussions as will illegal immigration.

In return, India would be willing to operationalise Pranab Mukherjee's promise made last November to make a one-time exception and export five lakh tonnes of rice to Bangladesh.

Union Ministers in New Delhi also spoke of the possibility of reducing Bangladesh's adverse balance of trade with India by encouraging Indian investment.

Bazlur Rahman

FROM PAGE 1
arrest while having dinner at Dhaka Club around 10.55pm, and the doctors declared him dead at 11.40pm. He was 67.

Bazlur is the husband of former minister and Awami League deputy member Matia Chowdhury.

Bazlur started his career as a reporter with the Sangbad in 1961. He also had a brief stint with the daily Ittefaq.

Born on August 3, 1941 in Baneshwardi village under Nokla of Sherpur, he