

3 parties ask EC

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It also urged EC to bar war criminals from taking part in the elections.

The CEC in reply said EC is not the proper forum to raise the issue of banning such political parties.

He also advised them to go to the HC with like-minded political parties and to file a writ in this connection.

The CEC however said EC has already incorporated a provision disqualifying war criminals from contesting the elections in its draft electoral reform proposal.

Responding to the issue, Election Commissioner Brig (ret'd) M Shakhawat Hossein said religion-based politics is allowed in many countries.

Citing the name Christian Democratic Party in Europe, he said Norendro Modi of BJP, a religion-based party in India, also won the election.

JATIYA PARTY (JP-MANJU)
Led by secretary general Sheikh Shahidul Islam, Jatiya Party (JP-Manju) during the dialogue urged the Election Commission to consider conducting election campaigns on behalf of political parties.

On the issue of political party registration, the JP delegation said non-registered political parties should not be allowed to do politics. Otherwise, they observed that the non-registered parties would seize the advantage and create chaos in politics and thus put the registered political parties on an uneven ground.

JP also urged the EC to complete the delimitation of parliamentary constituencies as early as possible.

It also urged the EC to hold elections to city corporations, municipalities and union parishads before holding the parliamentary elections.

JSD (ROB)

JSD (Rob) urged the EC to hold a joint dialogue among all political parties, professional bodies, civil society, armed forces and the EC for coming to a consensus about all national issues including holding of the parliamentary elections.

Led by Executive President Prof Muhammad Shafique, the JSD delegation urged the EC to cancel the practice of allocating permanent electoral symbols to political parties.

It also urged the EC to bar identified criminals and corrupt individuals from taking part in elections.

EC'S RESPONSE

Replying a query, the CEC said that the Commission is pondering over a suggestion from political parties to

sponsor election campaigns on the parties' behalf to cut campaign cost. "We are considering this. We are discussing the matter with BBC. Let's see what comes out of it," CEC Huda told the 11-member JP (Manju) delegation.

He also said state-owned BTV and local TV channels would also be consulted over the matter.

The CEC said the Commission might try it out before the city corporation elections. "If it's successful, we will consider it for the parliamentary elections as well."

The election schedule for city corporation elections will be announced in March, the CEC also said.

Huda however said if the Commission takes up the responsibility of the election campaigns on behalf of the parties, the political parties themselves must not campaign for their parties.

Replying to a JP (Manju) proposal, the CEC said there should not be a dual system in politics and the Commission would review the 'Political Party Act -1978' to see if any provision could be inserted in it.

Thaksin returns

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and then go directly to the Supreme Court and the justice ministry's special investigations department to hear corruption charges against him.

"I expect thousands people to welcome him at the airport," Noppadon told AFP.

The chief of immigration at Bangkok's airport, Lieutenant Colonel Pakkapon Sai-ubon, said a special room was being prepared for Thaksin's arrival, adding that he would be handed over to police immediately on arrival to be taken to court.

Delwar

FROM PAGE 16
kept behind bars in a bid to weaken BNP. But she would be freed through legal battle, he added.

He said BNP is going through a tough time but the party men should remain united to overcome the crisis.

BNP Joint Secretary General Selima Rahman, acting Office Secretary Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, former lawmakers Shamsuzzaman Dudu, Sohrab Uddin, and Nawaz Halima Arly, former student leader Habib-un-Nabi Sohel, Jessore district BNP leaders Chowdhury Shahidul Islam Nayán, Kazi Monirul Huda, Syed Sabeerul Haque, and Nazrul Islam, among others, were present.

Militants

FROM PAGE 16
militant den on December 14, 2005, when Arafat Rahman Sunny, brother of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) kinglypin Shaekh Abdur Rahman, was arrested at the Latif Hostel of the institute.

In his confession, Mufti Moineddin Abu Zandal, close associate of Huji chief Mufti Hannan, said that he had stayed in Latif Hostel for over one and a half years before his arrest on February 14 in Gazipur.

After the clashes between Shibir and Bangladesh Chhatra League activists during February 9-10, Zandal was forced to give up his refuge.

Meanwhile, a day after the arrest of Zandal, the intelligence agencies picked up a teacher of the institute who is also a city committee leader of the Jamaat.

Sources said intelligence agency members grilled him to learn about other teachers of the institute involved with the Huji and to find out the whereabouts of absconding Huji leaders. Although the teacher has been released, he remains under the close observation of the law enforcers, they added.

The neighbourhood Glass and Ceramic College is also a place of sanctuary for the militants, the sources said.

On April 9, 2007, Ashrafuddin Bhuiyan, a teacher of civil engineering department and the then superintendent of Latif Hostel, was shot dead by unidentified criminals in front of the hostel.

Many suspect that he had tipped off the law enforcers about JMB leader Sunny, leading to his arrest, and was murdered by the enraged militants as retribution.

Yesterday, Zandal was taken into a seven-day remand in connection with the murder.

Islami Chhatra Shibir activists gained a stronghold at the institute with the backing of several teachers with Jamaat background, sources said.

A teacher of civil engineering department, who is a city committee leader of Jamaat and once been a close aide of top Jamaat leader Golam Azam, and another teacher of Glass and Ceramic Institute, a union of Jamaat, had been supervising Shibir activities for quite some time, they added.

"There is no scope for denying the allegation that the militants remained hidden in the dormitories," Bangladesh Polytechnic Teachers' Association (BPTA) president Prof Shamsur Rahman told The Daily Star.

He urged the government to probe into the matter soon with utmost importance.

"If the students are involved they should be punished. Besides, the involvement of the teachers, if any, should also be found out," the BPTA president added.

Principal Shamshul Alam said that they have taken up several steps in the wake of the recent militant arrest.

No other activities, except for prayers, are allowed in the mosque of the institute and the Tablig members require permission to go and stay there. Besides, showing identity cards have been made mandatory for the students to enter the dormitories.

The principal also said that he has asked the police to monitor the situation of the campus.

4 murdered

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Police said the upper portion of a body was discovered in an abandoned travel bag on the third floor of an under-construction building at Kadamtoli. Motijheel police meanwhile discovered the lower part of a body from Indrapur rail crossing, which they now believe to be the missing part of the partial body recovered earlier.

In Rajani Bose Lane in the old Dhaka, a mob lynched an alleged mugger on Tuesday night after a group of three muggers shot a scrapped-metal shop owner.

Police said the three muggers tried to snatch a mobile set from Abdul Halim, 32, the scrapped-metal shop owner after entering his shop at around 7.45 in the evening. As Halim screamed out for help, the muggers shot him twice, critically injuring him.

Locals rushed to help on hearing the gunshots. They caught one of the muggers and beat him indiscriminately, killing him on the spot.

Police later recovered the body of the unidentified mugger in his thirties and sent it to Mitford Hospital morgue for autopsy.

The other two muggers managed to flee.

Halim was admitted to DMCH. His brother told reporters that the muggers had also taken money from the shop. He however could not say how much was stolen.

Kotwali police has filed a case in this connection.

Five killed

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wayside ditch. Five people were killed on the spot and at least 25 others were injured.

The driver and helper of the bus fled the spot after the accident.

Md. Kamal Uddin, officer in charge (OC) of Brahmanbaria sadar thana, led a police team to the spot and sent the injured passengers to Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital. Eleven seriously injured passengers were admitted to the hospital while others were released after first aid.

The dead were identified as Md. Helal Uddin, 20, of Kotiadi, Kishoreganj district and Md. Saydul, 35, of Netrokona district. Identities of three victims - aged between 35 and 40 - could not be known.

Their bodies were sent to the Brahmanbaria Sadar hospital for autopsy.

CA for protecting

FROM PAGE 1
Welfare Secretary MA Hye Howlader, Nicholas J Krafft, director of Network Operation for the Human Development Network, World Bank, and APDF Chairperson Judy Wee also spoke at the inaugural session that was presided over by NFOWD president Khandokar Zahurul Alam.

Mansur Ahmed Choudhuri, prominent disability rights activist in Bangladesh and director of Impact Foundation Bangladesh, presented the keynote paper at the function.

Persons with disabilities, local and foreign delegates, NGO leaders and distinguished personalities were present at the function.

The chief adviser said the progress so far made has undoubtedly improved the situation of the handicapped persons in Bangladesh but there is still much to do for them.

Steps should be taken on an urgent basis, including revising the Rules of Business of the government, to cater to the needs of disabled persons. Amendment to the Disability Welfare Act in line with the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is also an imperative, he told the assembly.

He urged legal experts, policymakers, development practitioners and disability activists to initiate the process of consultation with stakeholders on those issues.

"The foremost challenge for all of us at the moment is strong social and political commitment to the subject backed by administrative and legislative measures," he observed.

He said elimination of discrimination against persons with disabilities in existing legislative and policy structures also need immediate attention. And there is also an urgent need for mainstreaming disability issues at all levels of development planning to provide equal and non-discriminatory opportunities for them.

Fakhruddin mentioned that government-NGO collaboration on catering to the needs of disabled persons in Bangladesh has a proven track record and was recognised by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific in 2001.

Disability issues have also been included in national poverty reduction strategy, he said.

Referring to the government's various steps for the welfare and dignity of the disabled, he said the present government has signed and subsequently ratified the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities shortly after taking office.

He said Bangladesh was the first member-state of the OIC, second member-state of Saarc, third member-state of Commonwealth and eighth member-state of the United Nations to ratify this important UN instrument.

He further said the government has appointed 46 focal points for dealing with the needs of disabled persons in various ministries, divisions and agencies.

The agencies have been directed to prepare plans and programmes aimed at promoting services for people with disabilities for inclusion in the Annual Development Programme (ADP).

He said his government has approved restructuring of national Foundation for Development of Disabled Persons as a quasi-government, autonomous institution. And the institution has already started its operation with financial support from the government and the World Bank.

Dhaka-Kolkata

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Gupte said while work on commencing the train service is underway, the dates are yet to be discussed at a suitable bilateral forum.

On Feb 24, the council of advisers in a meeting approved a proposal for constructing fencing boxes inside Bangladesh and India 150 yards from the zero point for operating passenger train services.

The meeting approved the proposal incorporating a new provision in the draft agreement on the cross-border train movement.

The new provision says, "Considering the security of passengers and trains, the government of India and the government of Bangladesh may construct a box-type temporary fencing from zero point along the railway of 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."

Hand-written

FROM PAGE 1
"It's not surprising to have Bangladeshi travellers singled out for interrogation in the airports abroad as our passports barely meet the international standards," said an official from the Department of Immigration and Passport (DIP) asking not to be identified.

"Our passports are not machine-readable. The manual process of scripting and pasting photographs on the pages makes it vulnerable to forgery."

Untidy and barely readable handwritten data make the passports issued by DIP more sub-standard, raising questions about qualification of the officials concerned.

It sometimes appears the officials who fill out passports have little knowledge about spacing, indents or even alignments. They also tend to defy standard writing norms and use small letters where capital letters are a must.

A passport issued in December last year reads the bearer's occupation "Pnirale Sunrice" instead of "Private Service" and hometown "Meenliganj" instead of "Munsiganj".

In another passport issued in September last year, the bearer's name is barely recognisable. "I was appalled as I had to struggle to figure out the spelling of my own name," said Arafat-ur-Rahman, an undergraduate student.

His address was more confusing as "Sreenagar" can unmistakably pass as "Greenroad".

Such mistakes and typos are frequent in a good number of passports. Rokeya Begum, a resident of Rampura, was stunned to see she was sharing the same birth date and year with her eight-year-old daughter.

The error eventually cost her the visa to India after she spent a whole day in the queue with the application.

Another passport was issued with the expiry date 1917 instead of 2007. There are numerous instances an applicant had to wait several days to correct mistakes that were not their fault in the first place.

The passport holder may even be sent back to the country if foreign customs or law officials discover any such mistakes.

"This [passport] is what I will have to present to the world when I travel. Passport handwriting should be of a high standard. When you present it to anyone, for that moment you are like an ambassador representing your country and its values. A passport with bad handwriting gives likewise bad impression about one's origin," the DIP official said.

Jamuna bridge

FROM PAGE 1
The Bangladesh Bridge Authority appointed consultant firm Angel Lazaro and Associate to examine the depth of the cracks and suggest measures for mending the bridge for preventing any further deterioration of the situation.

The consultants will also supervise the repairing works of the bridge, which is so important as it links country's two parts separated by the river Jamuna.

Khan M Ibrahim Hossain, executive director of Bangladesh Bridge Authority, informed that it would take nearly 18 months to complete the whole and needs about Tk 100 crore.

"We know it is a long time, but the works will be completed without troubling vehicle movement," he said.

The 4.8-km-long Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge was opened to traffic in 1998, and though the bridge was built at a cost of Tk 4,000 crore with an expected service life of 100 years, in less than 10 years in service several cracks were detected across the bridge.

An inquiry committee formed by the communications ministry to examine the cracks submitted his report on December 27, 2006. The committee was headed by Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, vice-chancellor of BRAC University.

In his report Chowdhury identified the design deficiency for the cracks of Jamuna Bridge. He also informed that the cracks were created during the construction of the bridge.

But a delegation of Hyundai visited the Jamuna Bridge on June 17, 2006 and informed that changes in temperature is responsible for the bridge developing cracks.

Now the consultant firm Angel Lazaro and Associate will find out the cause of the cracks.

Communications Secretary Dr Mahbubur Rahman and Additional Secretary ATK Ismail were also present at the briefing.

Voter listing

FROM PAGE 1
throttle from November. Over the last few months, the EC has completed the voter listing job on offshore islands and remote areas.

"We will begin the final round of work in areas more or less adjacent to the cities, and we believe, that work will proceed much faster than the pace of the previous rounds of the job," the CEC said on Tuesday during a day-long electoral reform talks with political parties.

Simultaneously another crucial work of selecting spots for polling stations also reached almost the half-way mark to completion, the sources said.

"So, once the field level work of voter listing is completed, selection of spots for polling stations will also be completed soon after it," said a senior official of the EC Secretariat.

In November last year, the EC started the work of selecting spots for polling stations for the upcoming national and local government elections with help from the army, although the existing system empowers returning officers for doing the job.

According to the EC's decision, field level election officials have already begun selecting prospective spots for polling stations in their areas on completion of voter listings there.

The field level election officials have also been sending to the EC, lists of prospective spots for polling stations since January of this year, with approvals from the army representatives involved in the job in respective areas.

According to existing electoral laws, however, the list of polling stations is supposed to be finalised after the announcement of election schedules.

But for this year's elections, the EC will finalise the list of polling stations long before the announcement of poll schedules to avoid the usual controversies that surround the process of preparing the list, since it is usually made public through an official gazette notification only a couple of weeks ahead of the polling day, leaving the candidates with no chance to dispute the choices.

Govt gears

FROM PAGE 1
Secretaries of finance, home, foreign and law ministries, chairmen of National Board of Revenue and Securities and Exchange Commission, an additional attorney general and a deputy governor and an executive director of Bangladesh Bank are members of the committee.

A working committee will also be formed with representatives from each of the above organisations, the finance ministry order added.

Like many other countries, Bangladesh is facing problems in dealing with the growing menace of money laundering and financing of terrorism.

Bangladesh is also working to enact laws on anti-money laundering besides developing cooperation with other countries and the agencies concerned to bring back the money smuggled-out by corrupt people, Bangladesh Bank sources said.

The World Bank, as part of its ongoing support to recover the smuggled-out money, advised the government to form such a committee that deals with the money laundering issues.

The Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG), an autonomous and collaborative international organisation consisting 36-member jurisdictions and a number of international and regional observers, is likely to visit Bangladesh soon to see Bangladesh's capacity in tackling money laundering and terrorist financing issues.

\$300m disaster

FROM PAGE 1
The report estimated that the total damage and losses in cyclone Sidr was Tk 115.56 billion, of which, Tk 21.68 billion was in public sector while the rest in private sector.

A total of \$5.37 billion is required for rehabilitation and future protection programmes in the districts affected by cyclone Sidr, the report said.

Of this, \$300 million will be spent for the immediate recovery plans, while for medium to long-term recovery and reconstruction programmes, another \$1.07 billion is required, the report calculated.

Besides, \$4 billion is needed for the investment in the long-term disaster risk management programme, it said.

About the macroeconomic impact of cyclone Sidr, the report said that the estimated loss in the current fiscal year (FY08) from the cyclone amounts to Tk 25.76 billion at current market prices, which is approximately 0.5 percent of the national GDP.

The cyclone would increase the country's import bill and may also hurt exports in specific sectors, the report observed adding that some 0.5 million tonnes rice will need to be imported in the aftermath of the cyclone at an estimated cost of Tk 13.8 billion.

Referring to the government estimation, the report indicated that while Tk 35.3 billion is required for relief and recovery in the current fiscal year, the FY08 budget would be able to provide only Tk 9.5 billion.

In addition, the projected budget deficit will increase to 5.4 percent of the GDP while it was calculated 4.5 percent at the beginning of the fiscal year, the report said.

The report suggested the government start constructing at least 2,000 additional shelters in the high-risk zones and upgrading some 1,000 existing shelters.

Given the capacity for implementation and possible financial outlays, it would be reasonable to build about 100 new shelters and upgrade 200 shelters annually over the next five years, the donors observed.

The report also underscored the need for disaster shelters in frequently flood-hit areas and shelters for earthquakes and other natural calamities. These should be multi-purpose buildings with water supply, sanitation facilities and storage for food and other supplies needed for survival after a disaster.

The government should follow a systematic approach for upgrading the coastal embankments to ensure protection against future storm surges, the report said adding that damages and losses were much lower and lives were saved where effective embankments were present.

ent. The report estimated that the coastal embankment improvement programme with forestation would cost around \$1 billion. The first phase should start with investment of about \$300 million over the next five years, giving priority to the areas with high population density and economic activity, it added.

Nizami, Mojahid

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alliance government.

The ACC in the case accused the 16 of causing a loss of over Tk 158.71 crore to the public exchequer by awarding the production, management and maintenance contract through abuse of power.

Former BNP ministers who have been accused in the case are M Saifur Rahman, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, M Shamsul Islam, MK Anwar, barrister Aminul Haque, Altaf Hossain Chowdhury and AKM Mosharraf Hossain.

The others charged with the offence are former acting secretary to energy and mineral resources Nazrul Islam, former Petrobangla chairman SR Osmani, former Petrobangla director Mainul Ahsan, former managing director of Barapukuria Coal Mining Company Ltd Sirajul Islam and Hosaf Group chairman Moazzem Hossain.

FIR SUBMITTED
Our court correspondent adds: Dhaka court yesterday received the first information report (FIR) of the Barapukuria coal-mine deal embezzlement case filed against detained former premier Khaleda Zia and sixteen others - including ten former ministers.

After receiving the FIR, Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Golam Rabbani directed the investigation officer (IO) of the case to submit the probe report by March 30.

Assistant Director Shamsul Alam of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) filed the case on Tuesday against the accused for corruption in awarding the Barapukuria coalmine operation contract to a Chinese company, which was the highest bidder.

In the case filed with Shahbagh Police Station, the 16 have been accused of causing a loss of over Tk 158.71 crore to the public treasury by awarding the contract through abuse of power.

The complainant said the offence took place between June 2, 2003 and June 4, 2005 at the energy and mineral resources department.

The complainant has also brought allegations of misappropriation of government money, cheating and abuse of power for personal gains in the FIR.

Hillary, Obama clash

FROM PAGE 16
campaigning as they highlighted the signature differences between their historic White House bids.

Hillary highlighted recent mailers from the Obama campaign on her healthcare and trade proposals that contained "false, misleading and discredited information."

The literature on her plan for universal healthcare read "almost as if the health insurance companies and the Republicans wrote it," she said.

Despite repeated interruptions from Hillary, the Illinois senator hit back by stating her campaign "has constantly sent out negative attacks on us."

"We haven't whined about it," said Obama, whose healthcare plan focuses on driving down costs rather than making insurance mandatory.

Hillary's tone in Cleveland was being closely watched. In a debate last week in Texas, she had been expected to go on the offensive, but only unleashed a few poorly received attacks before ending on a vaudeville note.

Now, seated close to Obama at the 20th and possibly last Democratic debate of this lengthy primary season, Hillary came out fighting with her White House dream on the line heading into the March 4 battles in Ohio and Texas.

To scattered boos, she complained that she always received the first question of debates and pointed to a weekend skit on the satirical program "Saturday Night Live" in which news anchors fawned over Obama.

The first laughs came nearly an hour into the debate, when Obama gave Hillary "points for her delivery" after the MSNBC hosts aired a clip of

her mocking his soaring oratory as the chorus of "celestial choirs."

Obama said that Hillary had betrayed a critical lack of judgment on the Iraq war and insisted he was best placed to take on McCain in November's presidential election.

Obama took aim at Hillary's campaign theme that because of her long experience in Washington, only she was ready to be commander-in-chief on "day one."

Musharraf

FROM PAGE 16
The coalition has been wooing several independent MPs in a bid to gain the two-thirds majority, even if it is just to increase the pressure on Musharraf, a bulwark in US efforts to tackle al-Qaeda and Taliban militants.

The coalition gave no clear statement on whether they would seek Musharraf's impeachment, which local media reports say is a source of division between the coalition members.

A second option for the parties is Sharif's earlier suggestion -- that judges sacked by Musharraf under emergency rule in November should decide on the president's fate by ruling on the legality of his re-election last year.

Election Commission Secretary Kanwar Dilshad told AFP earlier that the election results would be officially announced on March 1.

3 Rab men

FROM PAGE 1
when DU electrician Ali Akkas was crossing the road on a bicycle.

The driver, who had to brake hard to save Akkas, rebuked the DU employee, prompting an altercation between them. At one stage the bodyguard came out of the car and beat Akkas indiscriminately leaving him injured.

The DU employee was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for treatment.

Coming back to the DU hall, Akkas informed its employees' union leader of the matter. Later, employees and students of the hall took to the street and demanded punishment to the Rab members by midnight.

Upon receiving the information, police Sergeant Akhter Hossain of Nilkhet Police Box rushed to the spot. The angry demonstrators assaulted Akhter and confined him in the hall for several hours.

Shahbagh police later rescued the sergeant.

When contacted, Rab Director (Legal and Media wing) Commander SMAK Azad said the Rab men have been closed to the headquarters.

They would be produced before the Rab director general for queries today and if found guilty, punitive action would be taken against them, he added.

Bazlur Rahman

FROM PAGE 16
Moghbazar and his village home so that people could pay their last respect.

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed in a press release expressed grief at the death of Bazlur Rahman and described him as a beacon of the country's journalism and an example of utmost dedication to the profession.

Recalling his heroic role in the Liberation War, Fakhruddin said, "The death of this progressive professional has caused irreparable loss not only to the newspaper he had served for almost five decades, but also to his country."

In separate condolence messages, different political parties, socio-cultural organisations, professionals' bodies and individuals expressed their profound shock at Bazlur Rahman's death.

Bazlur Rahman, husband of Awami League Presidium member Motia Chowdhury, died Tuesday night of a cardiac arrest at the age of 67 at Ibrahim Memorial Hospital and Cardiac Research Centre at Shahbagh. He had fallen ill at Dhaka Club.

He graduated in economics from Dhaka University. He earned popularity by writing articles regularly on economy and different areas of journalism.

Baz