

Hasina's treatment

FROM PAGE 16
treatment soon, heeding to the recommendations of the physicians.
We think that the government will take initiatives to send her abroad for her treatment on humanitarian grounds," Acting AL General Secretary Syed Ashraf...

Election Commission (EC) has failed to deal effectively with the controversies surrounding its invitation to BNP for electoral reform dialogues.

In a bid to strengthen the party organisation, AL decided to exchange views with the leaders of all districts and different municipality unit leaders, which is to start after March 26. The meeting also asked the acting general secretary to establish coordination between front organisations and the party.

Observing that the party's unity has been badly hampered due to provocative slogans by some party workers against a few 'reformist' leaders recently, it asked all party members to bring discipline to the ranks for maintaining unity.

AL protested the government's denial to let Sector Commanders' Forum hold their planned national convention, urging the government to let the forum hold its convention, and to let it continue its battle against war criminals.

The meeting also demanded that the government observe the birthday of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman with state honours, and declares the day a national holiday.

Demanding immediate withdrawal of the state of emergency and countrywide lifting of the ban on indoor politics, the meeting urged the EC to hold the parliamentary poll before local government elections.

The meeting reiterated its earlier call for starting immediately the proposed dialogues between the government and political parties.

UN pledges

FROM PAGE 1
to help the people tackle rising food prices, he quoted the adviser as saying.

"The best type of assistance is to support the budget and to find more resources for the Bangladesh budget, and there might be direct food assistance and supplies," said Dervis adding that budgetary support will be the best for reaching the poorest people.

The UNDP administrator also shed some light on the upside of the price rise, saying it will bring benefits to farmers and agricultural traders.

The government has recently revised its food assistance estimate to \$85 million, up from the \$60 million in the budget for the current fiscal.

Dervis said discussions between him and Azizul touched on agriculture, food issues, possibilities for energy development in Bangladesh, exports, the overall economic growth rate, attempts to increase national revenue earnings, and strengthening social safety nets.

Azizul however told waiting reporters that he did not bring up the food price situation with Dervis, but discussed climate change with him.

The adviser told Dervis that Bangladesh deserves more support to run climate change mitigation and adaptation projects, as the country will be at the forefront of victims of global warming.

"The UN official expressed full commitment and assured to sort out possible assistance through discussions," said Azizul.

Party post-holders

FROM PAGE 1
During EC's second round of electoral reform talks with political parties between February 24 and 28, most of the parties vehemently opposed the proposal.

But, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda defended the proposal saying local governments' orientation is to deliver services, and if political leaders holding party posts become elected representatives to local governments, they will not be able to perform their duties properly due to holding two posts in two different institutions.

Once the EC is empowered to promulgate election rules and the code of conduct for candidates contesting in elections to city corporations and municipalities, it will not have any obstacle to incorporating the proposal in the new law.

The EC already kept a provision for disqualifying political leaders holding party posts from contesting in polls to city corporations and municipalities, in its draft electoral rules for the two types of local governments, sources said.

In the draft code of conduct for candidates contesting in polls to city corporations and municipalities, the EC also kept provisions for imposing restrictions on using names of political parties or portraits of political leaders on electoral campaign posters, sources said.

Meanwhile, the LGRD ministry in an inter-ministerial meeting on March 11 finalised the drafts of Local Government Commission Ordinance 2008, City Corporation Ordinance 2008, and Municipalities Ordinance 2008.

Now, the ministry will send the draft ordinances to the council of advisers to the caretaker government for approval. Once the interim cabinet approves the drafts, the president will promulgate the ordinances turning them into laws.

The EC will announce the schedule for holding polls to four city corporations and seven municipalities after the laws are promulgated.

Bangabandhu

FROM PAGE 1
organisations, and socio-cultural organisations have taken up programmes to celebrate the day.

AL has chalked out a two-day programme including a discussion at the auditorium of the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh in the capital at 3:00pm tomorrow. Acting party President Zillur Rahman will chair the discussion.

Leaders of AL, its front organisations and socio-cultural organisations will place floral wreaths at the portrait of Sheikh Mujib at Bangabandhu Memorial Museum on road no-32 in the capital's Dhankhondi at 7:00am and also at Bangabandhu's mazar at Tungipara in Gopalganj at 12:30pm.

Both national and party flags will be hoisted at all AL offices across the country at 6:00am.

A milad and doa mahfil will also be held at his mazar in the afternoon.

In a statement yesterday, acting AL General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam urged people to observe Bangabandhu's birth anniversary in a befitting manner.

In another statement, acting party President Zillur Rahman said independent and sovereign Bangladesh emerged on the world map under Bangabandhu's gallant leadership.

He said the defeated forces in the liberation war began distorting history after the killing of the father of the nation to tarnish the country's image.

Zillur said the BNP-Jamaat coalition continued distorting history after assuming power through conspiracy in 2001.

The AL leader said Bangabandhu's eldest daughter Sheikh Hasina has been kept behind bars under false charges brought against her.

He demanded immediate release of Hasina for sending her abroad for better treatment.

Moeen seeks

FROM PAGE 1
Mithapukur upazila. Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association set up the training centre in cooperation with the army.

General Officer Commanding (GOC) of Rangpur Cantonment Maj Gen Syed Fatemi Ahmed Rumi presided over the function.

The army chief said the country needs to increase food production to meet the shortfall.

"We'll have an additional five lakh metric tons of food grains this year. The agriculture department, administration, armed forces and farmers have made concerted efforts to raise the food production," he said.

"We've harvested a bumper potato crop this season. Potato is a staple food and can substitute for rice," General Moeen said and advised more use of potato as food item.

He urged the farmers not to let an inch of their arable land lie fallow. He said the administration will extend all cooperation to the farmers, they will be provided with all inputs.

He said fertiliser and irrigation facilities will now be easily available to the farmers, but they will have to raise food production.

Pointing to the fisheries in Teesta irrigation canal, the army chief said the armed forces helped in implementing the project where 600 families are now earning livelihood.

Everyone should work. There

Edible oil

FROM PAGE 1
market for the high prices, the adviser said the government can do very little when the food prices are very high on the international market. There is adequate supply of foods in the local market, he said adding, "We are taking measures to keep the impact of price inflation to a tolerable level."

The IMF team during its meeting with the finance adviser made suggestions for modernising the taxation system by bringing reforms in the VAT (value added tax) collection system and the income tax act in a bid to increase revenue collection.

Mirza Aziz told reporters that the IMF team provided the government with a draft of suggestions incorporating possible changes in the Income Tax Act 1984 and the VAT system. "The NBR is now examining the possible changes in the Income Tax Act 1984 as well as the VAT system. Decisions in this regard will be taken later," he added.

Barapukuria coal mine

FROM PAGE 1
The mine did not even produce coal for months between October 2006 and August 2007.

Just a year ago, the Power Development Board (PDB) attempted to import coal to run its coal-fired power plant due to the mine's failure to supply coal.

The over-priced 260-million-dollar Chinese plant has so far consumed 9.7 lakh tonnes of coal since inception and remained the main consumer of the mine's coal.

The two-unit power plant was commissioned in December 2005. But except for the period of June and July 2006, the units seldom ran together steadily for a long time.

This happened either because of lack of coal supply or due to the plant's technical glitches," said a source.

Even the second unit remained shut down for most of the time this month.

If they operate properly, the two units of the plant consume 2,000 tonnes of coal daily while the mine is now producing 3,000 tonnes. As a result, the coal yard is obviously heading towards a saturation point.

"Even if the two units operate smoothly, we will have to sell coal in the commercial market to avoid saturation of the coal yard," the source added.

Since the beginning of commercial operation in 2006, the Barapukuria mine has seldom produced enough coal to fill up its coal yard that can store up to 1.3 lakh tonnes of coal. In addition, the power plant can store another 30,000 tonnes.

"Right now, stocks at the coal yard and the power plant have exceeded 1,30,000 tonnes. If the mine continues to produce at the current rate and if both the power plants operate steadily, the stock will be saturated by mid-April," said a BCMCL source.

The mine is currently producing coal from Face 1103, using just one set of mining tools instead of two as was originally designed. The BCMCL could achieve record production due to the production friendly situation at this mining face. Production from this face will end in mid-May.

Then it will take around 45 days to two months to start extracting coal from the next face. During these two months, the power plant will use coal from its coal yard.

"However, in two months, the power plant can consume maximum 1,00,000 tonnes of coal," said

can be no poverty in the country if 30 crore hands of 15 crore people are put to work. There will be no 'mongra', no food problem if everybody works, he said.

Gen Moeen urged the people to vote for honest and efficient candidates in the election, to be held by the end of this year.

"Vote for honest, educated and efficient candidates. Don't take money in exchange for vote or sell your vote. If you sell your vote to a dishonest candidate, they'll sell you after the election," he said.

The army chief said five crore people have already been registered as voters, adding that the voter list with national ID card will be completed in July.

He later visited Shalban Govt Primary School in the town where he started his schooling.

Rejoinder

FROM PAGE 1
Korean consortium are requesting Petrobangla for joint venture agreements to develop a coal mine in Dighipara coal zone.

"In response to their request, Petrobangla suggested them to participate in the selection process of a strategic partner through an open tender, if they intend to," it said.

OURREPLY
Korean companies Luxon and Kores have been categorically seeking stakes in Dighipara since 2006. Although follow up correspondence by the government revealed that those are actually 'shell' companies, the government nonetheless has been entertaining their proposals all along. Documents show that on dates as recent as February 10, 2008, January 9, 2008, and December 19, 2007 the energy ministry wrote to Petrobangla, seeking its opinion on the Korean proposal for a joint venture. The latest Petrobangla reply to those letters was issued on February 25 of this year and its subject was, 'Draft MoU between Petrobangla and the Korean Consortium'.

Although Petrobangla's response had been negative regarding the matter, the ministry's latest note on the subject was signed on March 10, 2008 and was forwarded to the special assistant to the chief of the caretaker government. It once again suggested that Petrobangla may be asked to send a joint venture policy to the government in this regard so that an MoU can be signed with the Korean consortium.

Sircar

FROM PAGE 16
"There may be so many reasons behind their failure," he said, adding that if this government were illegal then there would be no constitution in the country.

Sircar said he had no doubt about elections within this year.

"The chief of this government mentioned several times that the elections will be held within this year. I don't have any doubt about that," he said.

He also underscored the need for strengthening the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and said the prime minister, directly or indirectly, is also accountable to this committee.

Speaking at the function, World Bank Country Director Xian Zhu said the effectiveness of the government has been constrained by the lack of any requirement for the government to respond to the PAC's recommendations.

He said the administration's inability to follow the recommendations stems from the lack of continuity and permanent staff, research capacity and other logistic weaknesses.

PAC hearings are not open to the public despite public interest in it and the non-partisan nature of its mandate. As a result, the public are not well informed on the debate on auditors' findings, the position of the government, action taken in relation to the parliamentary scrutiny of the auditors' work, he said.

He also underscored the need for continuation of the work of the defunct Public Accounts Committee in whatever form the government may deem fit.

He said despite the government's firm commitment, progress towards an effective ad-hoc arrangement in the absence of a Public Accounts Committee is not visible.

Emphasising the need for an interim arrangement till the formation of the next Public Accounts Committee under the forthcoming parliament, he said the delay may cause unnecessary hardship to retired civil servants whose pension payment may have been on hold and audit reports for three consecutive years remain unattended.

Under the "Strengthening Public Accounts Committee Project", the World Bank will provide Tk 5.5 crore to the Parliament Secretariat to ensure effective and efficient operation of the constitutionally mandated functions of the Public Accounts Committee.

SC rebukes

FROM PAGE 1
At the outset of the submissions, Additional AG Salah Uddin Ahmed told the court that the impugned High Court judgment was wrong in law as it embarked on an area beyond its jurisdiction while setting aside entire trial proceedings.

This out-of-the-way edict was not even invoked by the writ petitioner, former premier Sheikh Hasina, he added.

"The High Court should not adjudicate the issue which was not put forward for remedy by the writ petitioner," he said, adding that the HC acted with 'mala fide intention' as it exercised its power beyond its scope.

He described it as a "colorable exercise of law". He submitted that the Emergency Powers Rules (EPR) cannot be declared illegal as it is a valid law under the Emergency Power Ordinance 2007, which was promulgated by the president in accordance with the provision of the Constitution.

The alleged criminal offence was tried under the Penal Code and the government had given sanction only to try the case under the Emergency Powers Rules (EPR) for speedy disposition of the trial, which is also guaranteed under the Constitution as fundamental right of a citizen, he contended.

The hearing remained inconclusive. It resumes today.

On February 6, the High Court, upon a writ petition filed by the detained Awami League president Hasina, had declared illegal the government sanction placing the case against her for trial under the EPR and quashed the entire trial proceedings.

On February 26, the Appellate Division upon an application granted the government leave to appeal against the HC rulings, fixing March 16 for hearing.

The apex court also stayed the operation of the HC judgment and stalled the trial of the extortion case against Hasina under the EPR until the appeal is resolved.

Azam J Chowdhury, managing director of East Coast Trading Pvt. Ltd., filed the Tk 3-crore extortion case against Hasina and her detained cousin and ex-minister Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim on June 13 last year with Gulshan police station.

Babar

FROM PAGE 16
was my hobby to collect various types of firearms," CID sources said quoting Emon.

They said as the remand ended Emon was shown arrested in an arms case and that he would be produced before the court today with a prayer for further remand to quiz him about his links to firearm dealers.

They said Detective Branch officials also went to the CID office to interrogate Emon in connection with different cases including the killings of former National University vice-chancellor Prof Aftab Ahmad and BNP leader and Emon's close associate Mostafa Zaman Shibli of ward-48.

CID sources said they are looking for Emon's wife to know about the money Emon earned through extortion and other criminal activities.

Missile strike kills 16

FROM PAGE 16
about six blasts, but had no details about casualties yet.

Missile strikes in Pakistan's tribal belt, many of them attributed to US-led forces in neighbouring Afghanistan, have increased in frequency in recent months.

In January, one such missile attack killed senior Al-Qaeda commander Abu Lath al-Libi in neighbouring North Waziristan.

Meanwhile in Islamabad, police said they had rounded up 110 suspects in connection with the bombing at the crowded Luna Caprese restaurant in a series of raids in the capital.

Security at key installations and diplomatic missions was stepped up.

A Turkish aid worker died and at least 10 other foreigners were wounded, including several US diplomats.

Security officials said the attack showed that Islamist militants linked to the tribal areas and behind a wave of recent attacks in Pakistan have changed tactics to target foreigners.

"This was the first attack in which foreigners have been targeted in Islamabad since 2002 and it shows a new trend," a top security official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

A suicide attacker armed with grenades stormed into a church in Islamabad's diplomatic enclave on March 17, 2002, killing a US diplomat's wife and teenage stepdaughter as well as two other worshippers.

GMG plans

FROM PAGE 1
GMG Airlines, now with a fleet of seven aircraft, operates flights to Kolkata, Delhi, Kathmandu, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Dubai in addition to domestic routes.

The carrier eyes an ambitious turnover of around Tk 1,350 crore in 2008 as it is set to fly to four new Middle Eastern destinations.

"We expect to hit Tk 1,350 crore turnover as we're going to fly to Abu Dhabi, Muscat, Kuwait and Doha in addition to our existing international destinations," Sattar said earlier in an interview with The Daily Star.

The airlines made a Tk 280 crore turnover last year.

In 2007, GMG carried 3.72 lakh passengers on international routes, achieving a 72 per cent growth from previous year's 2.16 lakh passengers.

Sattar said the company plans to start flights to Muscat in early June and to Kuwait and Doha in early August this year.

Launched in 1998, GMG had operated only domestic flights for six years and got the permission to operate on international routes in 2004.

Violence linked to Al-Qaeda and Taliban insurgents has left at least 600 people dead since the start of the year but all of the attacks have been on Pakistani targets, most of them security forces.

"The terrorists picked a soft target where they had prior information that some foreigners would be present at dinner time," the official said.

President Pervez Musharraf "strongly condemned" the bombing, APP said. Turkey also denounced the attack, and identified the victim as Sadiq Ender Baskaya, who had worked in Pakistan since 2005.

WB MD

FROM PAGE 16
Okonjo-Iweala will visit cyclone-affected areas in Patuakhali's Kalapara upazila and a community nutrition centre and village in Jamalpur that are being benefited from the WB-financed Social Investment Program Project (SIPP).

The former Nigerian foreign minister will also meet slum-dwellers in Dhaka and travel to the Jamuna Bridge.

She will discuss a long-term framework for natural disaster risk management for Bangladesh, power situation and private-sector development.

"In addition, she will address the Bank's ongoing program of support to improve governance, strengthen institutions of accountability and reduce corruption in Bangladesh," said an announcement from the WB country office.

Okonjo-Iweala will discuss the WB's support for the government's flood and cyclone restoration and medium-to-long-term recovery programs.

It has agreed, in cooperation with development partners, to help address cyclone- and flood-related needs. The Bank has so far approved \$297 million for flood and cyclone response.

Additional financing for livelihood restoration and an Emergency Recovery Credit for reconstruction and disaster-risk reduction are being prepared. Total World Bank assistance will exceed \$500 million.

Okonjo-Iweala's visit to Jamalpur, in particular, will show how the government-led community initiatives empower the rural poor, particularly the most vulnerable.

"SIPP has transformed lives of nearly two million people living in the 1,000 project villages in Jamalpur and Gaibandha by empowering the community to collectively identify, prioritise, plan, fund and implement their development needs," the announcement claimed.

Okonjo-Iweala is expected to leave Dhaka on March 20.

Pakistan parliament

FROM PAGE 16
others, including five Americans. Such attacks have led many Pakistanis to question Musharraf's alliance with the US.

Parliamentary elections last month in which his allies were routed illustrated the growing unhappiness with the former general, who has dominated Pakistan's politics in eight years of military rule. But the transition to democracy promises to be politically turbulent as Musharraf maneuvers to cling to the presidency amid the ambitions of the new civilian leaders.

Voters want lawmakers to quickly dismantle Musharraf's "one-man system" and focus their energy on bringing down double-digit inflation and tackling terrorism, said Mehdi Hasan, a prominent political analyst.

"But I am not optimistic," Hasan said, noting that Pakistan's 60-year history is littered with failed political dynasties. "It will take great efforts for the leaders of the parties to adjust and accommodate each other."

The outgoing speaker of the National Assembly will swear in the newly elected lawmakers Monday. Parliament will only get down to the real business of lawmaking once the new government takes office later in the month.

The parties set to lead it, however, have already outlined a set of priorities that could make for uncomfortable news to Musharraf and his Western backers.

The party of US slain opposition leader Benazir Bhutto won the most seats in the election. It plans to form a coalition with the party of another former premier, Nawaz Sharif, and a smaller party from the northwest where Taliban-style militants pose an increasing threat.

Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party has said its top priority will be to seek a U.N. investigation into her death in a gun-and-suicide-bomb attack on Dec. 27.

The coalition also hopes to amend the constitution to strip Musharraf of his power to dissolve the country's parliament and to dismiss the prime minister. The National Security Council, which gives the military a formal say in policy, may also be axed.

The coalition's most explosive plan is the restoration of some 60 senior judges who were purged from the courts by Musharraf when he declared emergency rule last November.

Musharraf swept aside the Supreme Court as it prepared to rule whether he was eligible for the five-year presidential term he won in an October vote in the outgoing parliament.

Few believe he would tolerate the reinstatement of the ousted chief justice. Itikhar Mohamed Chaudhry, whose defiance of Musharraf's efforts to fire him made him a popular hero. Chaudhry has been under house arrest for more than four months.

But Musharraf has shown no sign of heeding calls to resign from Sharif, the prime minister he ousted in a 1999 coup.

A push to return the judges to their posts is fraught with legal uncertainties, particularly if judges who were drafted after the emergency join Musharraf in resisting.

Bhutto's widower and political successor, Asif Ali Zardari, signed an agreement last weekend with Sharif promising to move a parliamentary resolution on the issue within 30 days of the new government taking office. But they have yet to explain how it can be done.

Members of the former ruling party point to how Sharif and Bhutto fought bitterly for power in the 1990s to argue that the newfound unity of their parties could prove short-lived.

A debate is already brewing over who should be prime minister. Makhdum Amin Fahim, a longtime Bhutto loyalist who was the initial front-runner, is resisting pressure from Sharif's party to withdraw from the race.

Musharraf has appealed to the coalition partners to put aside politics and focus on governing. Meanwhile, his outside support appears to be diminishing as well.

Shahjahan indicted

FROM PAGE 16
Court Inspector Abdul Wahab submitted the charge sheets to the court of Judicial Magistrate Abdullah Al-Mamun.

Three union parishad chairmen who are also Jamaat leaders, and a municipality chairman are also among the indicted.

Sources said Nur Ahmad of Sonakania union under Satkania upazila filed a case against the accused on May 14 last year in connection with extorting Tk 1 lakh from him while Jamal Uddin of Kutubpara village of the union filed another extortion case against the accused in connection with extorting Tk 3 lakh from him.

Investigation officer (IO) Neamatul Karim prepared the charge sheets accusing 16 persons in one case and 20 in the other.

Meanwhile, 17 cases are being revived against three high profile politicians, including the incumbent mayor and a former mayor of Chittagang City Corporation (CCC), sources said.

Fourteen of the cases are against detained CCC Mayor also Awami League leader ABM Mahiuddin Chowdhury, one against detained former CCC Mayor also former BNP minister Mir Mohammad Nasir, and two against industrialist also a BNP leader MA Hashem.

Sector Commanders

FROM PAGE 16
national convention this time, although the government did not give us permission to hold it last time," SCF Chief Coordinator Lt Gen (ret'd) Harun-ar-Rashid told The Daily Star last night.

"We have already sought government's permission for holding the convention," he said.

The national convention, originally scheduled for December 13 last year, was postponed on December 10.

Later, the SCF leaders rescheduled the convention for March 15. But they had to postpone it once again as Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner Naim Ahmed on March 13 refused to give them permission for holding the convention.

Lift emergency

FROM PAGE 16
predicted that a famine will hit the country next month and it will go on for the next several months despite a good harvest of Boro.

The coming three months -- April, May and June -- are very crucial for us. A famine will come because the prices of essentials are rising day by day whereas the people's income is not increasing," said Barakat adding that the government should take measures to reduce the prices of 18 commodities and declare those items as essential goods.

Awami League presidium member Tofail Ahmed demanded the caretaker government declare the schedule of general elections and withdraw the state of emergency.

"Present caretaker government should keep out of controversy. How did fanatics stage demonstrations and bring out processions against the national policy for women's development by breaching the emergency? On the other hand, why did the caretaker government stop the sector commanders' programme demanding trial of war criminals?" said Tofail.

BNP leader Brigadier (ret'd) Hannan Shah alleged that the caretaker government and the EC are less interested in holding the national elections by this year.

"It is very difficult to understand the activities of the caretaker government. The citizens want rule of an elected government. But it seems that the election commission is trying to delay the general elections as it is not following the roadmap. Only 40 per cent voter listing has been completed even after eight months," said Hannan.

Rahat Khan of daily Ittefaq moderated the roundtable. Awami League leader Amir Hossain Amu, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haq Inu, Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon, BNP leader Goyeshwar Roy, Jatiya Party leader GM Qader, barrister M Amir-UI Islam and Moulana Farid Uddin spoke among others.

CA arrives

FROM PAGE 16
London, received the chief adviser at the Heathrow airport.

Earlier, Fakhrudin, who led the Bangladesh delegation to the OIC Summit, left Dakar on Saturday night for London.

The chief adviser is scheduled to hold a meeting with British Prime Minister Gordon Brown at 10 Downing Street in London.

Besides, British Foreign Secretary David Miliband, and British Secretary of State for International Development Douglas Alexander, are also expected to call on Fakhrudin.