

EC lags behind

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He attributed the delay to the stalemate over the dialogue with the BNP.

The poll chief, however, reaffirmed that the long-stalled ninth parliamentary polls would be held by the year-end as declared in the roadmap.

The commission now plans to send the proposals to the government at the end of April since it believes it would be able to hold talks with the BNP after April 10, the day the High Court is scheduled to rule on the dispute over the party's leadership, said sources.

Reconstituted on February 4 last year, the present EC initiated a process to make sweeping electoral reforms and unveiled a set of proposals that end on April 5 last year. The previous day, CEC Huda met the then law adviser and asked for immediate withdrawal of restrictions on indoor politics so the EC can have discussions with the political parties to firm up the proposals.

But the government did not respond promptly to the call, leading to delay in opening the dialogue on electoral reforms.

On assurance that the curbs on indoor politics would soon be lifted, the EC announced its electoral roadmap on July 15.

There, it stipulated that the dialogue would be held between September and November last year and proposals for electoral reforms incorporated into laws by February this year.

The EC began its much-talked electoral reforms talks on September 12, two days after the government relaxed restrictions on indoor politics in the capital.

But the commission-BNP discussions originally scheduled for November 22 last year could not get underway due to legal complexities. Leaving out BNP, the EC held the second round of talks with 15 political parties in February.

Asked yesterday if the time for political parties to register would be extended as the law required has yet to come in force, the CEC did not reply.

Officials at the EC Secretariat however admitted that it might not be possible to maintain the June time frame.

"It's not clear when the laws will be ready. At least one more month might be needed for the proposals to become laws," a senior official said. If the proposals are made into laws by May, the registration time would have to be extended.

"Since we could not hold talks with the BNP we could not send a report to the government compiling the dialogue outcomes," the CEC said.

The government is working on its own account and the commission has no relation to it, he said referring to the initiative for talks between the

government and political parties this month.

Replying to another query, the CEC said the EC would not announce the schedule for polls to Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal and Sylhet city corporations until it receives the copy of the laws on the corporations.

Earlier, the commission had announced that it would hold elections to the four city corporations in April, and the schedule was to be published by March.

Asked if they are behind schedule in holding city corporation polls as per the electoral roadmap, Huda replied in the negative.

He said according to the roadmap the polls to local government bodies were supposed to begin from January this year and continue till October. "So, we still have time to hold city corporation elections within the time frame."

Quered, the CEC declined to make any comment on the two other election commissioners' reported grievances over placement of the EC Secretariat under sole control of the CEC.

Sources close to the commissioners—Muhammad Sohul Hussain and Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakhawati Hossain said the two plan to meet the chief adviser next week to register their objections to the issue.

The EC Secretariat has been freed from the prime minister's office in March.

Atiqullah Khan

FROM PAGE 16
(Rajuk) through forgery.

The judge also issued orders for confiscating all his ill-gotten assets.

Masud was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment for amassing wealth illegally and three years for concealing information in his wealth statement, which are to run consecutively.

Masud, chairman of Globe Janakantha Shilpa Paribar, is now behind bars. Joint forces arrested him on March 7 last year from his office at the Janakantha Bhaban. His sentence will be effective from the day of his arrest.

The sentence of his wife, who is on the run, will be effective from the day of her arrest or surrender.

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) filed the case with Ramna Police Station against Masud, his wife and their two sons Mishaal A Khan and Jishal A Khan on September 30 last year.

ACC Assistant Deputy Director Mahmud Hasan mentioned that they concealed information about wealth worth around Tk 1.4 crore in the wealth statement submitted to the commission. The ACC also found out that they amassed wealth worth around Tk 1.14 crore beyond their known sources of income.

Dhaka-Kolkata

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The train will leave Dhaka at 8:30am every Saturday, returning the next day while the train from Kolkata will start for Dhaka at 7:10am (local time) on Saturday and return on Sunday.

It will carry 418 passengers on the Dhaka-Kolkata route while it will carry 366 passengers on the Kolkata-Dhaka route. The fare has been fixed at US\$ 8 per person for economy class and US\$ 12 per person for first class in the air-conditioned compartment. Asleeping berth will cost \$20.

Tickets will be available only from Kamalapur Railway Station and can be purchased only after showing passport and visa, Ismail said, dispelling any doubts of ticket sales on the black market.

Passengers will be allowed to carry 35kilograms while a child below 5 years of age can carry 20kg without any charge.

Motirex Express will also have an on-board catering service.

There will be a routine engine check-up at Darshana during the 13 to 14 hour long journey over 538km of which 418km stretches across Bangladesh and 120km across India.

Also due to different signalling systems in the two countries, local locomotives will drive the train when it crosses borders. The crew change will take place at Darshana and Gedestations.

Passengers will need to pass through an immigration counter and customs at Darshana border.

Asked about a specific date for the signing of the deal, ATKM Ismail said though a date is yet to be fixed, it will be completed before April 14.

Joint Secretary (rail) of the communications ministry, Shafiq Uddin Ahmed, is expected to sign the deal on behalf of Bangladesh.

The two-day biannual meeting between rail officials chiefly concentrated on details of the Dhaka-Kolkata train service, but also discussed interchange of goods train at Benapole, running of the container service, rail linking of Agartala and Akhaura, outstanding claims of the Indian Railway and wagon hire charges.

The next bilateral meeting between the rail officials will be held in New Delhi in October this year.

250 industries

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The move, taken by the energy ministry on Tuesday, aims to ensure smooth gas supply to power plants to cope with the power shortages, which now hover between 800MW and 1000MW.

The austerity request is for next two months at best, the Titas MD said.

Aug 21 attack

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Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka against the accused for committing the crime. Badar was also wounded in the attack that left 23 killed and scores injured on the AL rally on Bangabandhu Avenue in the capital.

In the petition, ASP Fazul Kabir mentioned that after filing the case, the magistrate asked the officer-in-charge (OC) of Paltan police to inquire into the case and submit a report. But the case should be merged with the case that was filed by Motijheel police following the incident and that both cases should be investigated jointly. So, he sought permission from the court, the IO added.

The other accused in the petition case filed by Badar are Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahid, former BNP state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar, former BNP lawmakers Amanullah Aman, Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury, Mirza Abbas, Mosaddak Ali Fala, Barkat Ullah Bulu, Salahuddin Ahmed, Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu, Helaluzzaman Talukder Lal, Krishak Dal General Secretary Shahjahan Mian, Islami Bank Managing Director Nurul Islam and businessman Giasuddin Al Mamun.

The complainant said former BNP lawmakers Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu, Helaluzzaman Talukder Lal, businessman Giasuddin Al Mamun, Islami Bank Managing Director Nurul Islam, Krishak Dal General Secretary Shahjahan and some unidentified groups hurled grenades on the AL rally moments after Sheikh Hasina had stepped down from the dais.

The blasts were carried out on instructions from BNP Chairperson Khaleida Zia, Senior Joint Secretary General of BNP Tarique Rahman, Jamaat chief Matiur Rahman Nizami, former state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar, Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahid, former BNP lawmakers Amanullah Aman, Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury, Mirza Abbas, Mosaddak Ali Fala, Barkat Ullah Bulu and Salahuddin Ahmed, added the complainant.

The other accused in the case include Jamaat leader Abdul Kader Mollah, Brig Gen (ret'd) ASM Hannan Shah, then National Security Intelligence (NSI) chief Maj Gen (ret'd) Rezaul Haider, then police chief Modabber Hossain Chowdhury, former BNP minister Aminul Huq, Rajshahi City Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu, former additional inspector general of police Faruq Ahmed, former Dhaka Metropolitan Police commissioner Khoda Bux, Islami Bank Chairman Abdul Halim, Shahidul Huq Jamal of Propur, ward commissioner and BNP leader Chowdhury Alam and AKM Ahsanul Tayab Zakir of Bogra.

On November 1 last year, Harkat-ul-Jihad leader Mufti Abdul Hannan, his brother Mohibullah and two others had given confessional statements to a magistrate disclosing names of others responsible for the grenade attack of August 21, 2004.

CID has so far arrested 28 people including BNP leader Abdus Salam Pintu. Out of the arrestees, 18 were granted bail by the High Court and lower courts on different dates.

Gas crisis

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generation," said a highly placed source.

The gas crisis has been caused by declining gas production in the offshore Sangu field as well as inadequate transmission lines for its supply from large gas fields.

Petrobangla's affiliates which supply gas are presently rationing supply to power plants, fertiliser factories and some industrial and commercial consumers. Against a gas demand of 2,000 million cubic feet a day (mmcf), Petrobangla is currently supplying 1,773 mmcf. Though it can supply more, the existing pipeline network does not allow increase the supply where it is needed the most, sources said.

As a result, Power Development Board (PDB) is unable to generate around 640 MW to 700 MW power. The load shedding now is addition of ally caused by technical glitches of some other plants. The PDB is currently producing around 3,600 MW power against an unofficially estimated demand of more than 5,000 MW.

The PDB says acute gas crisis has forced it to cut power production at Raazan plant by 240 MW, Ghorashal 220 MW, Sikalbaha 10 MW, Haripur 34 MW, Siddhirganj 90 MW, Mymensingh 77 MW and Ashuganj plant by 10 MW. The authorities are now even requesting more than 200 industries to limit use of gas.

Presently, the PDB needs 840 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) gas to generate 4,028 MW power (most of which is gas fired). But Petrobangla and its affiliates can supply a maximum of 679 mmcf, said a top official of the power ministry Wednesday.

But from early next month, the government expects to have some small rental power plants to begin operation. By June, more than a dozen such small plants are expected to add 594 MW power to the national grid. But it will need 127 mmcf additional gas supply. The power ministry is now concerned whether there will be adequate gas supply to make these ventures successful.

In addition, two public sector power plants—Siddhirganj 220 MW and Fenchuganj 90 MW—are also expected to begin operation in the next few months. These will need another 67 mmcf of gas.

"The power sector alone needs 1,000 mmcf of gas this year so that the country can produce around 4,900 MW power, and thus minimise load shedding and avoid loss of GDP," the source added. Other than gas, Bangladesh uses hydro, coal and oil fired power.

"Each mmcf of gas produces four MW power. So, when Petrobangla is unable to provide us with 161 mmcf power, it amounts to not being able to generate 644 MW power," he added. "We don't know what will happen when several small and rental power projects start operating one by one from next month."

Petrobangla on the other hand has to ensure gas supply to other sectors as well. Right now, gas supply to fertiliser factories is getting as much priority as that for power generation. The power ministry believes the highest priority should be given to power generation since the load shedding level has become unbearable, affecting national productivity.

"There is no alternative to increasing gas production and supply for an immediate solution," said a Petrobangla official.

The government should follow the Power System Master Plan of 1995, where it was suggested that in case of gas crisis, the nation should opt for imported coal based power plants near the ports of Chittagong and Khulna for long-term solutions. Side by side, the government should emphasise offshore oil and gas exploration, the official added.

Fertiliser and power sectors consume around 1,000 mmcf of gas now and non-bulk or industrial, commercial, domestic etc sectors consume another 865 mmcf. To prioritise power production, the government Tuesday decided to reduce gas supply to non-bulk sector, specially to some industrial sectors like dyeing and re-rolling mills, through a rationing arrangement.

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AL, BNP

FROM PAGE 16
Awami League. "We'll also discuss the pre- and post-election situation," he said.

Asked whether they will demand for the release of Sheikh Hasina at the dialogue, Ashraf said, "We hope our leader will be sent abroad for treatment before the dialogue begins. So, we would not require to raise the issue."

BNP Joint Secretary General Goyeshwar Chandra Roy said the planned dialogue would help remove unrest and distrust between political parties and the government.

He, however, suggested the presence of detained BNP Chairperson Khaleida Zia and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina in order to make the dialogue effective.

Pro-reform BNP acting Secretary General Maj (ret'd) Hafizuddin Ahmed said they would raise three points -- transition to democracy, bringing down the soaring prices to a tolerable level and the release of Khaleida Zia -- at the dialogue.

He hoped that the dialogue would be held without any government condition.

Asked about food reserve, the food adviser said one lakh ton rice imported from India will reach the other four lakhs within 60 days after opening of a letter of credit.

The government is importing another 50,000 tons of rice through a private agency. Besides this, the government plans to procure 10 lakh tons of rice from local market.

Meanwhile the former finance adviser Akbar Ali Khan yesterday told the BBC Bengali Service that the government has responded to the food crisis within its capacity.

Though there is no exact statistics as to how many people have been benefited from the aid, it can still be assumed that the number of beneficiaries is less than those in need, he said.

He termed the period until end of April as critical in terms of food crisis and called on the government to create more jobs for the poor.

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War criminals

FROM PAGE 1
in Dhanmondi, the fact-finding committee said this is not the final list, and they would soon come up with another one with more evidence and documents.

The list and evidence would be handed to the government and Election Commission to help them try the war criminals and disqualify them from elections. Besides, those would be circulated to the international community.

Four women who were tortured by the Pakistan forces were present at the programme.

Local collaborators who are on the list and still alive mostly belong to Jamaat-e-Islami. Some of them who were then involved in Muslim League and Nezame Islam politics are now leaders of BNP and Jatiya Party.

Jamaat's former ameer Golam Azam, present chief Matiur Rahman Nizami, Secretary General Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mojahid, Assistant Secretaries General Muhammad Kamaruzzaman and AKM Yusuf, central committee members Delawar Hussain Sayeede, Abdus Sobhan, Abul Kalam Muhammad Yusuf and Abdul Quader Molla are among the high-profile Jamaat leaders on the list.

Former BNP lawmakers Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury and Abdul Alim, and Anwar Zahid, a former minister during Ershad rule, are also on the list that contains division- and thana-wise names of Razakar, Al Badr, and Peace Committee members.

"We have drawn up the list on the basis of field-level investigation, statements of eyewitnesses and victims, and examination of relevant documents for 17 long years," said Dr MA Hasan, convener of the committee dedicated to research on acts of genocide and atrocities committed in 1971.

He said they are ready to place all the necessary evidence and documents once the government forms a special tribunal to try the war criminals.

"We have prepared the list not to take revenge but to break the silence of impunity," observed Dr Hasan.

Gen AM Yahya Khan, former president of Pakistan, Lt Gen Tikka Khan, governor and martial law administrator of the then East Pakistan, Maj Gen Khadim Hussain Raja, general officer commanding (GOC) of the then East Pakistan, Maj Gen Rao Forman Ali, adviser to governor of the then