

BDB, PDP for polls

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advisers at the state guesthouse Meghna.

At the talks, the four parties also proposed holding local body polls prior to the national elections.

The meetings were held as part of the ongoing informal talks between the government and the political parties to prepare grounds for the forthcoming formal dialogue.

A delegation of Unity for Political Reforms (UPR), a reforms initiative, also met the advisers yesterday.

Law Adviser AF Hassan Arif, Communications Adviser Ghulam Quader, LGRD Adviser Anwarul Iqbal, Commerce Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman and Foreign Adviser Iftekar Ahmed Chowdhury, sat with the representatives of the parties.

BDB said that 'protective emergency' is imperative otherwise the election will turn into a display of black money and muscle power.

BDB and UPR also proposed forming a national consensus government after the election.

After about an hour-long meeting starting from 12.30pm, Ferdous Ahmad Quaderi, convener of PDP, told the reporters that caretaker government is giving too much importance to two major political parties who were responsible for the pre-1/11 situation.

For a fair election, it is necessary that the election be held under the state of emergency, he said adding that they had asked the advisers to relax some provisions of the emergency power rules four months prior to the election and to lift the ban on indoor politics.

Led by Quarishi, the eight-member PDP delegation submitted eight proposals to the panel of advisers.

The four-member BDB delegation proposed that the election be held as per the electoral roadmap.

About lifting of the state of emer-

gency, Mahi B Chowdhury said that they had asked the advisers so that 'protective emergency' prevails in the country till the election takes place.

It also urged the advisers to ensure proper treatment of the two detained former prime ministers Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia and their fair trial.

The BKP delegation was led by its chairman Maj Gen (ret'd) Syed Mohammad Ibrahim. Their proposals include bringing balance of power between prime minister and president and lifting of state of emergency four months before the election.

Meanwhile, LDP in its 13-point proposals emphasised on freeing all 'innocent' politicians who are behind bars and not to harass political leaders by filing 'false cases' against them.

The delegation was led by party secretary general Jahanara Begum.

Led by ASM Abdur Rob, the ten-member UPR delegation placed six proposals, which includes setting up of a special tribunal to try the war criminals and holding the election in line with the electoral roadmap.

They also demanded that the advisers bring amendments to the constitution to strike a balance between the powers of the prime minister and the president. It also proposed forming a national consensus government for ten years after the election.

Talking to the reporters after the daylong talks with the five parties, Adviser AF Hassan Arif on behalf of the panel of advisers said that they had discussed meaningful election, bringing qualitative changes in politics and how to involve people with the dialogue.

The advisers did not give any reply to questions asked by the reporters.

3 SCBs

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"The boards of the three banks will decide on the committee report on pay scale and the boards are now authorised to take independent decision on pay structure," he said.

Sources said the committee working on the new pay scale has already collected service rules and pay structure of different private commercial banks.

"We will not be able to provide as high as the private banks are offering, but there will be increase in salaries and other benefits," said a committee member. "We will also recommend bringing changes in the service rules of staffs at the state-owned banks."

Another member of the committee said, "In the new pay scale, there will be performance-based salary increase of staffs... Usually, staff salaries are increased at the state-owned banks through yearly increments. But the new pay scale will suggest salary enhancement for staffs performing well at any time of the year."

Referring to salaries of private commercial banks, a high official of a state-owned bank said a senior officer at their bank gets gross salary of Tk 11,040 while the same post at the private commercial banks yields Tk 30,000-40,000.

Another official said, "It is not possible to provide the staff at these banks with the same salaries as the private banks, but we will enhance the salaries gradually. Many skilled and competent officials are leaving the banks for lucrative salaries at the private banks."

As of December last year, the three state-owned banks had 50,000 staff.

A high official of Agrani Bank said many of their officials left their bank to join private banks for salaries five times higher.

"As we are a public limited company, we need to compete with the private banks and for this we need to employ competent staffs with good salaries," he said, adding that the banks will have to enhance staff salaries gradually considering the profit scenario of the banks.

In 2007, the three banks made Tk 1,673 crore profit with an increase of 55 percent, comparing to the profit of the previous year. Sonali Bank made Tk 606 crore profit while Janata Bank profited Tk 540 crore and Agrani Bank Tk 527 crore.

After adjusting the huge provision shortfall against defaulted loans, however, the net profit of the banks came to zero.

Operational expenses of Sonali Bank was Tk 570 crore last year while Janata Bank's operational cost was Tk 423 crore and Agrani Bank's Tk 315 crore. Available data shows that 79 percent of the operational cost of these banks was used for staff salaries and benefits.

Rejoinder

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It said as per the contract the rental power company is entitled to 15 days time for consultation to cure the default following the delivery of this notice. "Since the company has submitted the performance security deposit after getting the notice, no question of termination arises," it added. "The required commercial operation date of the plant shall remain same as per contract."

Our Reply
Our story did mention that it was a "notice of default and notice of intent to terminate" the contract, which was served on Energy Prima March 30 because the company has been failing to submit bank guarantee since early February. Energy Prima's response to that letter was on March 31, unilaterally putting April 15 as the time to cure the default. But, the contract says that this time frame has to be agreed on by the two parties. Finally, Energy Prima submitted the bank guarantee on April 16 but the documents were dated on April 15, two days after the time allowed by the contract. We stand by our story.

PSC

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"So it is mandatory that the government discuss the matter with the Public Service Commission," it added.

The Chief Adviser's Office, establishment and finance ministries and the EC Secretariat were issued copies of the letter signed by PSC Secretary Abdusattar.

But paying no heed to the concerns, the government on March 9 published a gazette notification of Election Commission Secretariat Ordinance 2008.

Following the developments, the PSC sent a letter to the law ministry on April 16, but it has yet to have any response from the recipient.

"The Public Service Commission believes that as per article 140 (2) of the constitution it was necessary for the government to have consultation with it before promulgating the ordinance," a highly placed source said, quoting from the letter.

Article 140 (2) of the constitution says the president shall consult (a) commission on methods of recruitment to the service of the republic, criteria and principles to be followed in making appointments and promotions and transfers from one branch to another, and also on matters affecting the terms and conditions as well as discipline of that service.

The EC Secretariat ordinance was approved in principle by the council of advisers to the caretaker government on June 23 last year. It was finalised by the advisory council and promulgated by President Iajuddin Ahmed in March this year.

The EC Secretariat ordinance stipulates that terms and conditions of the secretariat officials will be controlled through new rules.

The secretariat committee on administration development on April 10 approved service rules titled "Election Commission (Officers and Staff) Rules 2008".

These rules will replace the Election Commission (officers and staff) Rules 1979, said sources.

Gas tariff

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Petrobangla source.

Bapex had unfairly been labelled as a government burden since the government spends around Tk 30 crore for its overhead and administration purpose annually. But in reality, Bapex's problem originates from its unrealistic low gas sales revenue of Tk 7 per thousand cubic metre of gas whereas the international oil companies get close to three dollars (around Tk 200) per thousand cubic feet of gas. The government's bulk sale price of gas is Tk 92 per thousand cubic feet.

During Tuesday's presentation, Bapex Managing Director Muhammad Imaduddin raised the issue of the gas tariff, saying that to make the company achieve break even, Bapex's gas sale tariff should be raised to Tk 25 per thousand cubic feet of gas for the next two years, and then raised to Tk 50. Presently Bapex's gas production cost is between Tk 25 and Tk 50 per thousand cubic feet.

"If gas price is rationalised and interim support for exploration and development is given, Bapex will no longer require the government's financing for its overhead expenditure from 2011. By 2014-15, Bapex will not even need any government support for any of its activities," said a top Bapex source.

Currently, the government takes 55 percent of the gas sales revenue as tax, VAT and other charges. To

support Bapex, the government may lower this total charge to 50 percent.

"Since whatever you invest in Bapex have solid returns. The government has nothing to lose," the source said.

Bapex also presented its plans to explore various hydrocarbon zones and undertake other works. These will require Tk 3,200 crore as investment in the next seven years. The schemes are: work over of Fenchuganj Well-3 and drilling a new well, procuring one work-over rig, undertake appraisal well drilling in Sriakal hydrocarbon structure, development drilling on Saldanadi Gas Field, Begumganj Gas Field Development Project, drilling four exploratory wells in Block-8 and Block-11, Shalokupa Exploratory Well Drilling Project, Jaldi Exploratory Well Drilling Project and Sitakunda Exploratory Well Drilling Project.

"Since the chief adviser as well as the other policymakers of the government are keen on revitalising Bapex, we are expecting that the government would approve a package of projects along with confirmed funding so that Bapex does not have to repeatedly ask for project funding," quipped an official.

The Bapex board yesterday held a follow-up meeting and decided to ask Petrobangla to keep track of the outcomes of the meeting with the chief adviser.

Saline price

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selling SMC's saline at Tk 65 per sachet (consisting of 20 small packets) yesterday while the maximum retail price (MRP) is fixed at Tk 60.

"We are purchasing SMC's oral saline from Mitford at higher price over the last few weeks as its supply is too limited but demand is too high," said a drug seller, Shah Alam.

A drug seller at Uttara said the company has cut its supply in the last two months. "Earlier, we used to buy one sachet of oral saline at Tk 52, and we are buying it at Tk 60 for the last several weeks."

A resident of Uttara said, "Salesmen asked for Tk 5 per packet of SMC's saline on the excuse of short supply of it, and I had to buy it at Tk 4 a packet while the retail price is fixed at Tk 3."

Several retailers at Shahbagh said they have no supply of SMC's saline for the last three weeks while several others said they were not facing any supply shortage.

When contacted, the marketing manager of SMC said they have neither increased the price of oral saline nor decreased its production and supply.

"It is the wholesalers who create artificial crisis of the item to sell it at higher price as its demand rises in the summer due outbreak of diarrhoeal diseases," said another SMC official.

Meanwhile, the number of diarrhoea patients in different areas of the capital is increasing since last week.

Some 336 diarrhoea patients were admitted to the International Centre of Diarrhoeal Diseases and Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B) yesterday till 4:00 pm. About the same number of patients were admitted on the day before yesterday.

According to the control room at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), some

CA reaffirms

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wished its success.

Terming the present relations between Bangladesh and China excellent, Fakhruddin said both the countries are enjoying a comprehensive partnership of cooperation, and expressed satisfaction over the growing bilateral trade.

The head of the caretaker government reaffirmed Bangladesh's support to "One China policy".

He said Dhaka-Kunming air link has marked a great success and enhanced trade and people-to-people contacts.

The chief adviser emphasised Bangladesh-Myanmar-China road links for further improving trade and bilateral cooperation.

He also stressed the need for reducing trade imbalance between the two countries, and sought Chinese support for the agriculture sector as Bangladesh is focused on further development of agriculture to boost food production to keep its domestic market price stable in the wake of global price hike.

The chief adviser also sought increased Chinese investment in Bangladesh saying the government is thinking about setting up a special economic zone where Chinese investors can invest.

The Chinese foreign minister said China considers Bangladesh its good and tested friend.

Appreciating the performance of the caretaker government under the leadership of Fakhruddin Ahmed, he said the present caretaker government has done a lot for the people of Bangladesh.

He emphasised further increasing cultural and educational exchanges between the two countries and thanked Bangladesh for allowing China to be an observer of SAARC.

Chinese Ambassador in Dhaka Zheng Qingdian, Secretary to Chief Adviser's Office

Kazi Aminul Islam, Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim and Bangladesh Ambassador in Beijing were also present at the meeting.

2,116 people were attacked with diarrhoea since Wednesday morning while three died of this disease. The number rose to 14,572 across the country since last week.

"Almost 20 percent of the outdoor patients are now seeking treatment for diarrhoea in our hospital, which was 15 percent earlier," said Dr Mahbubul Hasan of Dhaka Shishu Hospital.

"Due to the heat spell, dehydration takes place and at the same time some types of bacteria grow quickly in foods. And by taking these foods, people develop diarrhoeal diseases," he said.

Huji man Sumon

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Tajuddin, suspected supplier of the grenades used in the August 21 attack, fled the country following his brother BNP leader and former deputy minister Abdus Salam Pintu's suggestion around a month after the tenure of the BNP-led alliance government expired, sources said.

He was even seen at a rally held at the north gate of Baitul Mukarram mosque under the banner "Sachatan Islamic Janata" in October, 2006, sources said.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) investigating the grenade attack case arrested Pintu January 18 in Dhaka after finding evidence of Pintu's involvement in the attack that left 24 Awami League leaders and activists dead and scores more injured.

Sumon, a suspect of hurling the grenades, admitted to the interrogators that he also visited Singapore and Malaysia. Huji leader Mufti Abdul Hannan had borne all expenses for his visits, an interrogator told The Daily Star quoting Sumon.

He, however, is yet to disclose why he went to those countries.

Sumon while being quizzed by the Taskforce For Interrogation (TFI) admitted to the interrogators that he had a plan to visit Libya along with another Huji operative Sharif Shahedul Alam alias Bipul to have arms training. Bipul who had such training from the African country was arrested at Tilagahr point in Sylhet September 4, 2006.

An interrogator also said Sumon admitted to them that he knew Hannan, Tajuddin and several other militant leaders very well but did not admitted to having links with the grenade attack.

A CID team arrested Sumon in Mohammadpur April 12.

Laws

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are also aimed at strengthening the local-government institutions and ensuring effective participation of grassroots people in development projects in their areas.

As per provision of the Local Government Commission Ordinance, the president of the country will appoint the chairman and members of the Local Government Commission for three years on recommendation of the selection committee.

Age of the chairman and members of the commission should not exceed 70 years. A joint secretary-level official would act as the secretary to the independent local government commission.

The chairman of the Public Service Commission will be the president and the secretary of Local Government Division and the comptroller and the accountant general would be the members of the selection committee.

The Local Government (City Corporation) Ordinance, 2008 was made by unifying earlier six separate City Corporation Acts. The ward commissioner would be renamed councillors.

Under the new ordinance, chairman of a municipality would be called "mayor" or "Poura Mayor".

Members of the Advisory Council attended the meeting at the Chief Adviser's Office yesterday. Cabinet Secretary, chief adviser's press secretary and secretaries concerned were also present.

Gen Moeen

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today. He said no land should be left unused to combat this situation.

Gen Moeen said, "We have to bring the unused land under cultivation to overcome our own food shortages, and export the excess."

Earlier the army chief inaugurated a Boro harvest at Bhabadaha in Monoharpur village in Manirampur where farmers welcomed him with traditional songs, drum beats and music in Bhabadaha beel area.

Gen Moeen inaugurated the festival by cutting sheafs of paddy with a scythe at the Kopolia paddy field beside the Monoharpur Technical College.

The army chief said that the army began the ongoing project in the Bhabadaha area in October 2006. With cooperation from the local administration, the army helped the Water Development Board in river dredging projects in the area.

The current project would complete in 2009 and ensure proper cultivation by addressing the water-logging problems in the area.

The army would extend its full cooperation to the implementation of the project, he added.

That would enable another 200 hectares of land to come under cultivation here, in addition to the 16,000 hectares that was brought under cultivation since the project began, the army chief informed the people.

Gen Moeen also told the crowd that the procurement price of rice has been fixed at Tk 28 per kg and paddy at Tk 18 per kg at the government-purchasing centre after discussions with farmers.

The army chief announced fertiliser machinery for the farmers of Avaynagar, Manirampur and Keshabpur. He also announced one computer for the Bhabadaha Degree College and two computers for Monoharpur Technical College on behalf of the armed forces.

Major General Rafiqul Islam psc, General Officer Commanding (GOC) of Jessore Cantonment, said the joint efforts of the government, army and water development boards have resulted in good production of paddy in the area.

Abul Hossain, deputy commissioner (DC) of Jessore and local farmer Harendra Nath Biswas also spoke at the programme.

Colonel SM Golam Ambia, commander of 105 brigade of Jessore cantonment, apprised Gen Moeen about the condition of Bhabadaha area. GOC of Jessore Cantonment, the DC, police super and other government officials were present at that time.

SC Bar body

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A censure motion came from an emergency general meeting of the association following the apex court's ruling.

Terming the SC edict, disappointing, the meeting observed that the balance in dispensation of justice would be "jeopardised in society following the judgment".

The meeting also demanded the rescinding of section 19 (GHA) of the EPR that revoked the right to bail of an accused in a criminal case being tried under the EPR.

The meeting endorsed a resolution by voice vote declaring not to give traditional retirement farewell to Chief Justice M Ruhul Amin and reception to new chief justice as a mark of protest.

SCBA President Barrister M Amir-ul Islam chaired the meeting addressed by Barrister Rafique-ul Huq, Shafique Ahmed, SCBA secretary M Amin Uddin, former SCBA secretary M Enayetur Rahim and SM Shawkat Ali.

8 killed

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were killed on the spot, while another one died on the way to Bogra hospital.

The dead were identified as truck driver Lal Mia, 40, Ershad Ali, 30, and Raton, 32, all of them from Dariapur village in Rangpur, Rezaul Karim, 27, Rahimuddin, 35, Jahangir Alam, 33, and Moslem Ali, 34, all from Kalikamari village in Shahzadpur upazila of Sirajganj and Fayzul Islam, 60, of Kacharikanda village in Dadra upazila of Shariatpur.

Police and locals rushed to the spot after the accident and rescued the injured.

They were admitted to Sirajganj Sadar Hospital, Raiganj upazila health complex and Bogra Mohammad Ali Hospital. Of them, condition of three is very critical, the doctors said.

Most of the deceased and the injured were either traders or labourers.

Police recovered the bodies and sent those to Sirajganj Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy. A case was lodged with Hatikumrul Highway Police Station.

Ashraf Ali, deputy commissioner and Alamgir Rahman, police super in Sirajganj, visited the spot. After the inauguration of Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge, the number of accidents, especially on the western side of the bridge, has seen a sharp rise, locals said.

The statistics from the Hatikumrul Highway Police Station say that over 100 accidents, some of them major, occurred between January 2007 and March 2008 under the station's jurisdiction killing some 151 people and injuring 165.

But the actual figure is double the number, a police official said seeking anonymity.

Contacted, officer-in-charge (OC) of the police station Tozammel Haque cited absence of road dividers, lack of proper training to the drivers and their tendency to overload the vehicles as the main reasons behind the accidents.

Maoists vow

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any compromise on this," Maoist leader Prachanda told journalists.

The former rebel chief, who goes by one name, spoke after meeting foreign ambassadors and UN officials as he prepared to take charge of the new government.

Despite their surprise victory, the Maoist leader said that the ex-insurgents could not rule out the use of violence.

"Right now, I cannot renounce every kind of violence," Prachanda, or the "fierce one" warned.

"We want to lead this process to a logical conclusion and we want to create a model of peace. Through this we want to renounce reactionary violence," said Prachanda.

He did not explain what he meant by "reactionary violence" but shortly after, Maoist spokesman Krishna Bahadur Mahara contradicted him.

"We can't think of engaging in violence again when we are coming to power through the ballot," Krishna Bahadur Mahara told AFP. The Maoists, who fought a bloody insurgency that ended in 2006 with 13,000 dead, swept double the number of seats of their nearest rivals and favourites, officials said Thursday.

After counting was completed late Wednesday, the Maoists "emerged well ahead," election commission official Matika Shrestha told AFP.

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) won a total of 217 seats in the new 601-member constituent assembly, which is expected to sit for the first time in coming weeks and abolish the 240-year-old monarchy.

The Nepal Congress -- traditionally the dominant party in the Himalayan nation -- took just 107 seats in the April 10 polls, election officials said.

After being Nepal's second largest party for years, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) won 101 seats in the body that will chart the impoverished country's political future.

The new government is due to fill further 26 seats.

Despite the historic win, the Maoists want to work with their

Pak al-Qaeda

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have links to Osama bin Laden's network, issued the order amid peace talks with the government.

The typed letter distributed Wednesday in the tribal region of Waziristan and in parts of North West Frontier Province bordering Afghanistan warned that those who violated the order would be punished severely.

"Violators of the order will be publicly hanged upside down in main bazaars," added Mehsud, known to be one of the top militant commanders in the rugged region.

"The order is final and there will be no leniency."

A senior Taliban source confirmed the contents. "We have issued the letter," he said requesting anonymity.

The letter emerged came a day after officials said that the new government, which defeated allies of President Pervez Musharraf in elections in February, had drafted a peace agreement with Taliban in the tribal belt.

CNG price

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to set up generators within the next eight months.

Sources in Petrobangla said the new price would help increase revenues of the state-run corporation. From sale of one cubic metre CNG at Tk 8.5, Petrobangla used to earn Tk 2.37 while the rest would go to fuel station owners. Now it will get Tk 9.97 from Tk 16.75.

In the wake of galloping prices of conventional fuels and environmental concerns, the government has been encouraging people to convert their vehicles to run on CNG that is low-price and considered to be eco-friendly.

The use of CNG as motor fuel started becoming popular with more conversion plants and pumps being installed in the private sector.

8-yr-old girl

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Court issued a suo moto asking the Metropolitan Police Magistrate of Khulna to explain why the action of arresting an eight-year old girl and putting her behind bars on charge of carrying phensidyl should not be declared unlawful.

The HC division bench headed by Justice M Imran Ali issued the rule following a petition moved by Fahima Nasreen, central vice president of BNWL.

Fahima Nasreen, drawing attention of the