



Civil society to be invited to formal dialogue

Says Hossain Zillur  
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Apart from political parties, civil society representatives will also be invited to the formal dialogue with the government, Commerce Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman said yesterday.

"The chief adviser will address the nation in a week giving guidelines about the formal dialogue," the commerce adviser told reporters at the Secretariat after a dialogue preparatory meeting at the office of Communications Adviser Maj Gen (ret'd) Ghulam Quader.

Zillur Rahman, is one of the five advisers assigned to coordinate pre-dialogue talks between the government and political parties, business community and civil society representatives.

"We are now at the final stage of preparation for holding formal dialogue," he said, adding that they

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## Khaleda charged with Niko graft

Charge sheet against Hasina likely today

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday pressed charges against detained former prime minister Khaleda Zia and 10 others for abuse of power and graft in awarding a gas exploration and extraction deal to Canadian company Niko.

Former law minister Moudud Ahmed and former state minister for energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain are among the other charge-sheeted accused.

This is the first time formal charges have been laid against Khaleda since her arrest on September 3 last year.

The ACC is likely to submit charge sheet today against Awami

League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina, another detained former prime minister, and six others in a similar case involving Niko Resources Limited.

SM Sahidur Rahman, ACC assistant director and the investigation officer (IO), submitted the charge sheet to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court in Dhaka, showing 68 people as prosecution witnesses.

Kamal Uddin Siddique, former principal secretary to prime minister, Khandaker Shahidul Islam, former acting energy secretary, CM Yousuf Hossain, former senior assistant secretary of Energy and Mineral Resources Department, Meer Moynul Haque, former senior general manager of Bapex, Shafiq

Rahman, former secretary of Bapex, Giasuddin Al Mamun, managing director of One Group, Selim Bhuiyan, chairman and managing director of International Travel Corporation, and Kashem Sharif, vice-president (South Asia) of Niko Resources Bangladesh Ltd, are the others indicted.

Though arrested on other charges, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, Moudud, Mosharraf, Shahidul, Selim and Mamun were later shown arrested in the Niko graft case.

The IO said the 11 should be brought to trial as the charges against them have been proved primarily.

Besides, he appealed the court to issue warrants for arrest of

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RAMNA BLAST

Sumon carried bombs along with 3 other Huji men

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detained Harkatul Jihad (Huji) leader Arif Hasan Sumon yesterday confessed to a court that he along with three other Huji members took four bombs to the Pabla Baishakh celebrations at Ramna Batamul on April 14, 2001 and detonated them remotely.

After his five-day remand in two phases under Criminal Investigation Department's (CID) custody, he gave the confessional statement before Metropolitan Magistrate Waliul Islam between 2:30pm and 5:30pm yesterday.

In the statement, he said he and three other Huji activists—Jewel, Sujon and Jonny—carried out the bomb attack at Ramna Batamul. He said three of the four bombs kept in a food containers exploded.

The police later recovered the

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NEXT YEAR'S BUDGET

## Big jump in revenue collection planned

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The next fiscal budget may set a target of Tk 70,200 crore as revenue collection, which will be 23 percent higher compared to the revenue income target of the current fiscal year.

But despite the huge revenue target the government will have to depend on loans from banking sector to meet deficit of the planned Tk 100,800 crore budget in coming fiscal, sources said.

The original budget of the current fiscal year set 16 percent revenue growth compared to the revised budget of the preceding year. The current fiscal budget sets a target to collect Tk 57,300 crore revenue.

Preliminary estimate shows that of the Tk 70,200 crore revenue

target, Tk 54,700 crore is NBR tax and the rest non-NBR tax and non-tax revenue.

Sources in the National Board of Revenue (NBR) said it is going to set a target to collect Tk 54,700 crore tax in next fiscal, which is 25 percent higher than the current fiscal year.

The current fiscal budget sets a growth target of 17 percent or Tk 43,850 crore in case of NBR compared to the previous year collection.

The first nine-month data of the current fiscal shows that there was 23 percent growth in NBR tax collection though the growth target was 17 percent. Growth in income tax collection was 35.6 percent compared to previous year's first nine-month scenario.

In case of VAT, the growth was

22.31 percent and supplementary duties and other taxes growth was 31.47 percent.

However, customs duty growth is only 7.66 percent in the current fiscal as per data of the first nine months.

NBR sources said the next budget would focus on VAT and income tax for achieving the increased revenue target.

"We are planning to set an increased revenue collection in the next fiscal year after a satisfactory revenue collection in the current fiscal," said an official of the NBR.

He said usually the revised budget downsizes the revenue target due to poor collection, but this year is showing a very bright picture.

The next fiscal will also expand

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PHOTO: STAR

Awami League acting President Zillur Rahman takes juice after the party's six-hour token hunger strike programme at its Dhanmondi office yesterday demanding release of Sheikh Hasina.

## Release Hasina soon for polls, treatment

Says AL after hunger strike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) yesterday renewed its call to the caretaker government to release its detained chief Sheikh Hasina immediately, so the party may take part in the upcoming parliamentary election under her leadership.

The country's present political crisis will not be resolved without the release of AL chief, said senior leaders of the party yesterday while addressing the party's token hunger strikers demanding Hasina's release, who has been detained since July 16 of last year.

AL went on a six-hour token hunger strike to press home the demand for Hasina's unconditional release, and for permission to send her to the US for treatment.

The programme, however, was observed on a limited scale as the party got permission from the

authorities to stage its first ever demonstration since Hasina's arrest, only in its central office on Bangabandhu Avenue and in its president's political office in Dhanmondi, both in the capital.

Earlier on April 30, Dhaka Metropolitan Police imposed a ban on the announced demonstration terming it 'illegal' under the Emergency Power Rules 2007.

AL had originally planned to stage the hunger strike in all district towns, and in all thanas of the capital.

The strike started at 10:00am and ended around 4:00pm. Acting AL chief Zillur Rahman concluded the demonstration by offering juice and water to the hunger striking leaders and activists in Hasina's political office while Presidium Member Amir Hossain Amu offered the same to the strikers in

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## Death traps on roads

Over 5,500 buses violate traffic rules at will in city

SHARIFUL ISLAM

Most of over 5,500 buses and minibuses running on city routes frequently violate traffic rules, contributing to traffic congestion and making it hazardous for passengers, pedestrians and other transport.

These public vehicles stop almost anywhere to pick up or drop passengers, even while crossing a traffic signal or in the middle of a crossroads. A moment of chaos is immediately created as other vehicles behind impatiently honk

to cross the signal before the red lights are on.

This is an everyday scene in all the main bus stoppages including Mirpur-1 and 10, Farmgate, Karwan Bazar and Gulistan.

Moreover, operators of these buses 'invent' new stoppages and thus add to traffic congestion. For instance, buses and minibuses frequently stop at a crossing between Karwan Bazar and Hotel Sonargaon.

Taxis and three-wheelers are also often seen looking for passengers on busy VIP roads which slows

down vehicular movement.

An unhealthy race between two or more buses is also very common. The drivers at this time drive so recklessly that the buses slide against each other and often ram vehicles ahead.

The speed limit for vehicles other than motorcycles is 40 km/h in the city, but hardly any drivers follow the rule. The traffic police department also has no apparent mechanism to enforce the speed limit.

"If I don't ensure maximum

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PHOTO: STAR

Busses plying between Mirpur-1 and Mirpur-10 haphazardly park to drop passengers and take new ones obstructing traffic on the street yesterday.

## 9 foreign companies ready to take part in offshore bidding

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least nine foreign oil and gas companies including some leading global names have expressed keen interest in the country's offshore block bidding for exploration.

Some of these companies are expected to submit tomorrow their offers for exploration in eight shallow water blocks and 20 deep-sea blocks in the Bay of Bengal.

Petrobangla said it sold promotional package and data of the offshore blocks worth \$1.26 million to 24 companies. Of them, nine purchased both promotional and data packages and the others purchased only the promotional package.

US company Chevron, Norwegian Statoilhydro Company, US Conoco Phillips, Australian Santos International and Pearl Energy of Singapore purchased the highest volumes of data package.

Other oil companies that appeared to be serious are PTT of Thailand, BP Exploration Operating Co of UK, Talisman Energy Canada and Total E&P

Bangladesh of France.

Since the bidding round was announced in February, 37 companies expressed interest in the bid and purchased the information package. These companies include some Bangladeshi entities as well as Chinese, Malaysian, Indian, Japanese, South Korean and Myanmar ones.

"We will be glad if five or six of them actually drop serious offers," said a Petrobangla high official.

The response received did not however make petrobangla officials very happy as many of them felt that it could have been better.

"It would have drawn more interest of the oil companies if promotional shows were staged in one or two countries," observed one official. The 1998-second round bidding initiatives included road shows in UK and USA, and received huge response. Besides, some other Asian countries are also currently holding exploration bids and thus engaged many oil companies there.

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## Govt, not ACC, made arrest decisions

Lt Gen Mashhud says about graft suspects

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Lt Gen (ret'd) Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury, the chief of Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), yesterday said the government, not the ACC, made all the arrest orders in the ACC cases.

"We [the ACC] are not interested in arrests. The arrests are being

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## UK hopes for polls without emergency

Outgoing HC tells AL, BNP leaders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Outgoing British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury yesterday said the UK government hopes the general election in Bangladesh would be held without a state of emergency in force.

He said if a complete withdrawal

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## Chevron violated terms of environmental clearance from govt

Says monitoring committee

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government-formed environment monitoring committee to oversee Chevron's 3D seismic survey in Lawachhara forest yesterday said that the US oil and gas company has violated the conditions of government's environmental clearance certificate (ECC).

Chevron did not inform the environment ministry about the fire incident on April 26 and about cracks developed on many houses in the area due to explosions during seismic survey, which is in clear violation of the ECC, said a report by the committee.

It recommended that the government warn Chevron and cancel the ECC issued to it if it violates the conditions again. The committee also recommended demanding compensation from the company for the local people whose houses have developed cracks.

The committee went to Lawachhara forest on April 29 to investigate the fire.

It submitted the report to the Ministry of Environment and Forests yesterday, where it also held a meeting and discussed the report. A representative from Chevron was also present who was informed about the committee's findings.

The fire did not occur due to the explosions during survey work by Chevron, but it might be set off by the activities of the survey crew, the report said.

A local officer of Forest Department told the committee that the energy company did not inform them of their work plan, such as in which places they were going to conduct the survey prior to their activities, the committee said.

The energy company has conducted 268 blasts in the area so far.

The investigation found that Chevron is not conducting the seismic survey by properly trained staff, the report said adding that it even does not have any coordination with the local people regarding

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