

AL, BNP talk to allies

FROM PAGE 1
except for Rashed Khan Menon's Workers' Party of Bangladesh, has yet made any such demand for the release of Hasina.

Both the AL acting President Zillur Rahman and BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain have been demanding immediate release of their party chiefs without further delay to make the dialogue meaningful and fruitful.

4-PARTY ALLIANCE MEETING
The other demands of the four-party alliance include lifting of the state of emergency, announcement of a specific poll date, introduction of rationing system and ensuring enough food supply, controlling prices of essentials and taking necessary steps to resolve the power, water and fertiliser crises, reopen the laid-off industries and ensure employment, among others.

Briefing journalists after the alliance's meeting at his Nam flat, Khandaker Delwar said, "The government must release Khaleda Zia without further delay if it wants to make the dialogue meaningful and fruitful."

Asked if they will participate in the dialogue, he said the decision would be taken through further discussion within the party as well as the alliance. He said they had not yet sent the names of their representatives to the talks.

BNP standing committee member RA Gani, Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed and Joint Secretary General Abdul Quader Mollah, Islami Oikya Jote Secretary General Abdul Latif Nazami and Bangladesh Jatiya Party Chairman Andalib Rahman Partha and Secretary General Shamim Al Mamun were present at the meeting with Delwar in the chair. The meeting started at 4:00pm and lasted for one and a half hours.

The meeting marked the first activity of the four-party alliance after 16 months; its last meeting was held on January 22 last year at Hawa Bhaban. The alliance leaders did not even issue any statement after Khaleda's arrest.

Delwar said they discussed all the burning political, economic and social issues and prepared a 14-point common demand, which, he said, must be realised to make the dialogue successful.

Delwar also demanded withdrawal of the Gato case and release of political leaders including Shamsul Islam, MK Anwar and Jamaat chief Motiur Rahman Nizami.

He said the chief adviser's address to the nation created a lot of confusions in the people's minds and the government would be responsible if the dialogue fails.

He urged the Election Commission to refrain from implementing a certain quarter's interest and holding any election before the parliamentary polls. He also asked the commission why it is delaying preparation of the complete voter list.

Replying to a query, Delwar said

they would not take part in any election if they reach a consensus that the election will not be neutral.

Demanding cancellation of the gazette of constituency demarcation, he said the decision to hold the local government elections before the parliamentary ones has to be cancelled and interferences in judiciary should be stopped immediately.

Mojaheed said the release of not just their party chief Nizami but also Hasina and Khaleda is necessary to make the dialogue fruitful. "The government has to prove its sincerity for the success of the dialogue," he said.

Asked why Jamaat did not demand Khaleda's release after her arrest, Mojaheed said their aim was in Saudi Arabia at that time and that he talked about the matter after his return.

AL-SAMYABADI MEETING
As part of its series of bilateral talks, the AL yesterday held a meeting with the Samyabadi Dal, one of the components in the 14-party combine.

Held at AL acting President Zillur Rahman's Gulshan residence, both the parties observed that the dialogue would not be successful without the participation of Hasina and her party.

The meeting asked the government to withdraw the state of emergency ahead of the parliamentary elections.

Briefing newsmen, Zillur said the AL had not decided yet whether to join the dialogue and the Samyabadi Dal also expressed views about Hasina's release similar to the AL.

Samyabadi Dal General Secretary Dilip Barua said his party would join the dialogue and request the government to ensure Hasina's participation in the dialogue to make it successful. He expressed hope that the AL would join the dialogue.

Senior leaders of both the parties were present at the meeting.

AL-IFB MEETING
The Islamic Front Bangladesh (IFB) at a meeting with the AL yesterday demanded immediate release of Hasina and other political detainees.

Addressing the meeting held at Zillur's residence, the IFB leaders asked the AL not to join the dialogue and the election if Hasina is not released. They urged the AL to make the AL-led grand electoral alliance active further to press home the demand.

Zillur assured them that they would make the grand alliance active ahead of the parliamentary election.

IFB Chairman Allama Syed Bahadur Shah Mujaddidi urged the government to stop harassing political leaders and filing cases against them. He also suggested forging a united movement for the trial of the war criminals and barring them from taking part in the elections.

AL leaders Tofail Ahmed and Akhtaruzzaman were also present at the meeting.

3 murdered

FROM PAGE 16
The two youths killed at a city hotel were identified as Anwar Sadat Khan Russel, 25, Mohammad Makhon Khan, 25, and the injured as Haider Ali, 25.

Of them, Russel was a leaseholder of a small jetty in Kishoreganj and son of former Jafrabad UP chairman Asaduzzaman while Makhon and Haider work as scrap metal traders in city's Tejaon Industrial Area.

Gulshan police said they recovered the three youths from near Hotel Taj at about 1:00am and rushed to them to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where the doctors declared Makhon dead on arrival.

Russel died at about 2:00am and Haider is said to be in critical condition. All three victims from Karimganj upazila in Kishoreganj and were friends.

Police said that the youths had been beaten brutally inside the hotel and the hotel staff had locked up the hotel and fled after the incident.

The reason behind the beating is not known yet, police said.

The three friends had met up on Wednesday night at around 10pm in Nimtola in Old Dhaka where Makhon and Haider had gone on business.

Russel's uncle Emran Hasan told The Daily Star, "Russel came to Dhaka last Monday for a hearing in the court in a dispute over a lease for Chamrabandh Kheyaghat in Karimganj."

"There are feuds between Russel's father, an three-times elected chairman, and the present chairman over several issues. We suspect the present chairman may be involved in the murders," he said.

Russel's father has filed a case with Gulshan police station accusing 21 people, most of them his village opponents.

Paltan Police discovered Jewel's from Nayapaltan Balurmath at about 5:30pm.

Police said unidentified gunmen shot him and fled the scene. The reason behind the attack is not known.

In another incident, unidentified criminals at East Rampura shot at a newspaper hawker at 12:30pm.

He was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

EC violated

FROM PAGE 1
election intentionally.

"They could have completed the voter list, identity cards and other processes for holding the polls much before. But they killed time to make sure the election cannot be held before December this year," he added.

Shahdeen Malik, counsel for the EC, on the other hand, placed stress on the HC's observation that the decision to hold the parliamentary election in December is reasonable.

He said whether to file an appeal with the apex court against the judgment would be decided later.

Earlier on April 30, the court asked the polls body to inform it through affidavit when it would have the voter list ready and hold the next parliamentary election.

The EC in its statement to the court did not mention any specific date for election.

It said it would hold a free, fair and acceptable election by the year-end, and announce the election date in due course.

The statement also informed the court that over 6.41 crore people have been registered as voters as of May 2.

Desa engineer

FROM PAGE 16
Asked about his properties, Majibur said, "It is not possible to enumerate all my properties verbally because there are several pieces of land at different places."

"The task force officials called me to their office and I submitted my wealth report to them," he said, adding, "There is no complaint against me as I have always paid my taxes regularly."

Replying to another question, Majibur said he was never involved in any corruption and illegal activities.

Desa sources said all of its about 4,500 staffers submitted their wealth statements to the task force, which has so far interrogated 250 Desa employees.

CU student

FROM PAGE 16
The VC assured the students of giving Tk 5 lakh to Mamun's family before next Sunday and taking proper steps to solve the transport crisis immediately.

The students around 3:30pm withdrew the blockade and left.

Meanwhile, Railway East Zone Divisional Manager Ibrahim Khalil told The Daily Star that they formed a three-member probe body headed by Divisional Commercial Officer SM Shahnewaj to investigate the incident.

Ibrahim said, "The committee has been asked to submit its report by tomorrow (Friday) and if anyone is found guilty he or she would be punished."

Mamun, son of Mohammad Ali of Bahuli village of Patiya upazila in Chittagong, was living with his cousin Omar Ali at the city's Bakalia area.

Hasina's trial

FROM PAGE 1
on investigation during over two-hour trial at the special court set up on the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises from 10:00am.

The trial began at the court of Special Judge Firoz Alam on Wednesday.

The judge adjourned trial at 12:25pm and fixed May 25 (Sunday) morning for further proceedings after Hasina's lawyers filed a petition seeking adjournment for the day.

Before adjournment the judge, however, reminded the defence that they will have to complete trial within the stipulated time.

The detained Awami League chief, Hasina, was taken to the court around 10:00am. Another accused, former power secretary Dr Toufique-e-Elahi Chowdhury was also hauled before the court.

The defence asked the plaintiff whether he knows anything about rewarding 10 ACC officials on June 28 last year. He replied he cannot recall anything like that.

In response to another question whether he would be rewarded if Hasina was punished, he said, "It's not true."

As the defence asked Sabir whether he has filed the case following directives of a group of "identified conspirators" active to tarnish the image of Hasina, he denied, saying he filed the case as per procedures.

Asked why he did not mention the name of Hasina's mother in the FIR, the plaintiff said it was not intentional.

When the defence asked him whether he or his father was a freedom fighter, the prosecution objected and said the Liberation War is a great matter and should not arise here.

The defence later told newsmen they raised the question as the plaintiff did not write "Bir Bikram" after the name of an accused despite the nation awarded him the gallantry award for his heroic role in the War of Liberation.

Advocate Syed Razanur Rahman mainly cross-examined the plaintiff when some other lawyers including advocates Yusuf Hossain Humayun and Shahara Khatun assisted him.

Asked whether Hasina told them anything, the lawyers said she had suggested her trial not be held under electric fan using electricity generated by the power plants, for installation of which she has been made accused.

They also said the plaintiff earlier on Wednesday told the court Hasina herself took the kickbacks from two companies, which were awarded contract for installing three large-mounted power plants. But in the FIR (first information report) he mentioned Hasina did not receive the money directly.

They said the investigation of the case was not carried out lawfully as the investigation officer did it being "directed" by high-ups in ACC and from outside.

They also said the investigation

BSF kills 1

FROM PAGE 16
5:00am. Kafiluddin received bullets and died instantly.

Immediately after the incident, the Indian border guards took away the body.

BDR sent a letter to its Indian counterpart demanding return of the body.

Responding to the letter, The BSF authorities said they will hand over the body after a flag meeting scheduled for today.

Ershad acquitted

FROM PAGE 1
he was deposited in a popular uprising in 1990. In August and September 2006, he was acquitted in four graft cases following his announcement of joining the BNP-led four-party alliance. He was also acquitted in a gold smuggling case.

Judge Golam Mortuza Majumder of the Special Court for Dhaka Division also acquitted detained former chairman of Bangladesh Shilpa Bank AKM Mosharrar Hossain and four others in the case.

The four others are Managing Director (MD) of M/s Three Star Poultry Farm Ltd Jahangir Kabir, directors of the farm Firoz Kabir, Borhan Uddin and Jahangir's wife Nurunnahar Shelly.

According to the prosecution, former president Ershad and former chairman of Bangladesh Shilpa Bank AKM Mosharrar Hossain, allegedly abusing power, directed the authorities concerned to sanction Tk 35 lakh loan in favour of M/s Three Star Poultry Farm Ltd on September 4, 1979.

Golam Mortuza, an official of the now defunct Bureau of Anti-corruption, filed the graft case with Motiheel Police Station against Ershad, Mosharrar and four others on April 22, 1991. The investigation officer pressed charges against Ershad and five others on November 6, 1991.

During the judgment, Ershad, Mosharrar, Firoz and Borhan were present in the court while Jahangir and Shelly were absent.

Soon after the verdict, Ershad expressed his satisfaction, saying the case was filed on false allegation to harass him.

"The prosecution could not prove the charges brought against Ershad and five others. So, they are acquitted of charges," the judge said

officer did not question the then energy minister issuing a notice during the course of investigation.

The lawyers went on to say the case has been filed after over 10 years and it is clear that the case is "false and fabricated" and is filed as part of a "blueprint".

Prosecution counsel Advocate Golam Kibria however told reporters a police station can record such a case anytime after it is brought to their cognisance.

The ACC filed the case with Tejaon Police Station on September 2, 2007.

According to the case details, the Power Development Board floated international tenders on October 24, 1996 for installation of three large-mounted plants in Haripur, Shiklabaha and Khulna.

During Hasina's tenure, Hasina and seven other accused through mutual understanding and use of influence helped Wartsila Power Development Ltd Consortium and its two local partners win a deal for setting up a large-mounted 100MW power plant in Khulna depriving the lowest bidder, Summit Group and United Group are the local partners of Wartsila.

The case also mentions that a few days before and after the deal, the three companies paid a Tk 3 crore kickback, which was spent for buying a house with a piece of land in Dhanmondi for Bangabandhu Memorial Trust set up and controlled by Hasina.

Hasina was shown arrested in the case on September 19 last year, while former power secretary Toufique-e-Elahi surrendered to the court on January 16. Hasina was arrested at her Dhanmondi residence on July 16 last year.

No more funds

FROM PAGE 16
reporters after a meeting of Executive Committee of National Economic Council (Ecnec) at the finance ministry.

"Our first priority is to utilise the investment we have already made... then comes the matter of investigation," Mirza Aziz said when journalists referred to a recent report carried by a vernacular daily that revealed gross corruption and political consideration behind the construction of 2,728 bridges, works of which are still unfinished.

The ministries concerned were directed to allocate money to complete approach roads to the necessary bridges, the finance adviser said adding that the matter came to their notice around three months before the news was published.

Works of most of these bridges began during the last BNP-Jamaat alliance at a cost of the Tk 1,000 crore, mainly to benefit the party members, the news source said.

An arms case was filed with Mohammadpur police and charges were pressed against Aslam and two others on July 15 the same year. Aslam was arrested on May 20, 1997.

Earlier he was acquitted from a charge in another case on October 17, 2006.

JP rejects

FROM PAGE 16
"Our party is registered with the Election Commission as Jatiya Party, not as Jatiya Party (Ershad)," the letter said adding, "We, therefore, could not accept the letter that has addressed our party within brackets."

"It was also disgraceful that my name was not mentioned in the invitation letter as the secretary general of the party," Hawlader told The Daily Star.

Jatiya Party said after getting a 'corrected' letter from the government, they would take decision about joining the dialogue in consultation with the party leaders.

"We will think about taking part in the dialogue if the government sends us a corrected letter," JP presidium member Ziauddin Ahmed Bablu told The Daily Star.

On May 19, pro-Khaleda faction of BNP also rejected the government invitation letter to the formal dialogue at first, saying it did not address party secretary general Khandaker Delwar Hossain properly.

It later accepted the government invitation when a new letter was sent mentioning Delwar as the party secretary general.

Earlier, the court recorded statements of eight prosecution witnesses, including the complainant and the investigation officer (IO), of the case.

Trial of the case began on May 30 last year. The proceeding of the case remained stayed for a long time due to a High Court order even though the charges were framed on July 7, 1992.

THREE CASES PENDING
Three other corruption cases filed against Ershad have been pending with the same court for a long time.

According to the statement of the first case filed with Tejaon Police Station in 1992, Ershad, while in power, allegedly directed the authorities concerned to purchase ENG (electronic news-gathering) equipment worth about Tk 2.93 crore for his and his wife's use even though all broadcasting facilities were available at this secretariat.

According to the second case filed with the same police station, it was alleged that Ershad, defying the authorities' decision, directed people concerned to accept donations from France instead of Finland to set up Microwave Telephone Lines in 49 upazilas. The government had to pay Tk 28 crore to France in interest, as the plan was not implemented finally, sources said.

In the third case filed with the Cantonment Police Station on May 4, 1992, it was alleged that Ershad directed the authorities concerned to purchase two high-power radars for Bangladesh Air Forces violating the recommendation of the radar evaluation team. It allegedly caused a loss of Tk 64 crore to the government.

Govt pledges

FROM PAGE 1
In terms of local elections, he said nothing would be done to distract the government's focus from the general elections.

Meanwhile in the other dialogue in the afternoon, a BDB delegation led by former president and party chief Badruddoza Chowdhury proposed greater balance between presidential and prime ministerial power and shortening government terms to four years.

The BDB delegates also proposed formation of a constitutional commission, demanded withdrawal of the state of emergency but asked for a "protective" emergency during polls. They also suggested the next government must be based on a consensus.

BDB leader Mahi B Chowdhury told a joint press briefing after the meet they asked the government to balance the power between the president and the prime minister because they feel the president's roles too ceremonial.

He also said the elected government's tenure should be curtailed to four years, but a referendum would be held after its first two years in office to check if it still carries the popular mandate.

If not, BDB proposes, the government would immediately hand over power to an interim government.

He also said the next elections, and therefore the next government, have to be a "consensus government" to build the country's "democratic future".

Mahi said they also proposed a greater representation of civil society leaders, women and minorities in parliament.

Sweden Aslam

FROM PAGE 16
After cross-examination of 11 prosecution witnesses, Judge Mohammad Motiur Rahman of the Special Tribunal-7 handed down the verdict in presence of the convict Sweden in a packed courtroom.

According to the prosecution, a team of policemen raided a house city in Aargoaan area on May 25, 1997. They arrested Wahid and seized a revolver with six bullets from the house.

Based on information given by Wahid, police arrested Shariful Islam who told them that Aslam had given him the firearm and ammunition.

An arms case was filed with Mohammadpur police and charges were pressed against Aslam and two others on July 15 the same year. Aslam was arrested on May 20, 1997.

Earlier he was acquitted from a charge in another case on October 17, 2006.

JP rejects

FROM PAGE 16
"Our party is registered with the Election Commission as Jatiya Party, not as Jatiya Party (Ershad)," the letter said adding, "We, therefore, could not accept the letter that has addressed our party within brackets."

"It was also disgraceful that my name was not mentioned in the invitation letter as the secretary general of the party," Hawlader told The Daily Star.

Jatiya Party said after getting a 'corrected' letter from the government, they would take decision about joining the dialogue in consultation with the party leaders.

"We will think about taking part in the dialogue if the government sends us a corrected letter," JP presidium member Ziauddin Ahmed Bablu told The Daily Star.

On May 19, pro-Khaleda faction of BNP also rejected the government invitation letter to the formal dialogue at first, saying it did not address party secretary general Khandaker Delwar Hossain properly.

It later accepted the government invitation when a new letter was sent mentioning Delwar as the party secretary general.

Earlier, the court recorded statements of eight prosecution witnesses, including the complainant and the investigation officer (IO), of the case.

Trial of the case began on May 30 last year. The proceeding of the case remained stayed for a long time due to a High Court order even though the charges were framed on July 7, 1992.

THREE CASES PENDING
Three other corruption cases filed against Ershad have been pending with the same court for a long time.

According to the statement of the first case filed with Tejaon Police Station in 1992, Ershad, while in power, allegedly directed the authorities concerned to purchase ENG (electronic news-gathering) equipment worth about Tk 2.93 crore for his and his wife's use even though all broadcasting facilities were available at this secretariat.

According to the second case filed with the same police station, it was alleged that Ershad, defying the authorities' decision, directed people concerned to accept donations from France instead of Finland to set up Microwave Telephone Lines in 49 upazilas. The government had to pay Tk 28 crore to France in interest, as the plan was not implemented finally, sources said.

In the third case filed with the Cantonment Police Station on May 4, 1992, it was alleged that Ershad directed the authorities concerned to purchase two high-power radars for Bangladesh Air Forces violating the recommendation of the radar evaluation team. It allegedly caused a loss of Tk 64 crore to the government.

PSI system of imports

FROM PAGE 1
sat with them several times to conclude unanimously that PSI is no permanent system and it should be withdrawn after a provisional period on expiry of the present contracts, read the April 9 document of the Internal Resources Division of the finance ministry.

In Asia, the mandatory PSI system exists only in Bangladesh and Cambodia, with Pakistan discarding the arrangement in late nineties after a brief stint. The voluntary PSI system was introduced in 1992 by then BNP government, and it was made mandatory 8 years later in a bid to help generate revenue by minimising widespread corruption in customs and ending hassle for importers in clearing goods quickly.

"The PSI system is like a caretaker government. It is no permanent solution," NBR Chairman Muhammad Abdul Mazid told The Daily Star.

He also hoped that the one-year target is quite realistic for his board to take over the charge, adding that it however depends on three ifs to complete capacity building.

His three ifs include sufficient manpower, end to litigation and completion of automation.

Meanwhile, the committee advised NBR to go for all-out drive in capacity building of the customs during the interim period of two years, recommending it either to renew the present PSI contract or to initiate fresh appointments.

Against a backdrop of controversy surrounding appointment of PSI agencies, the government wants to ensure transparency in the licence awarding process.

PSI agencies this time will be selected in accordance with the procedure set out in the Public Procurement Act, 2006 and the Public Procurement Rules, 2008, and any persuasion will disqualify a contract aspirant.

Different business chambers spoke against rushing back to non-PSI era as the customs department could not yet offer the kind of service businesses require to stay in the race of highly competitive market.

Their worries were echoed in the analysis of the NBR committee, which felt that customs officials became too much dependent on the PSI system, lamenting the facts that

no valuation database could be built as yet and the skill and training that require in customs to man corruption of this level is missing.

The committee also stressed effective coordination between stakeholders and the customs authorities before saying bye to the mandatory PSI system after eight years.

The government also reacts at reports of mind-blowing instances of corruption through the PSI system abuse by increasing financial penalties for irregularities in many folds.

In an attempt to discourage PSI companies from the tendency of frequent litigation against customs penalties, the government has also decided to withhold the service charges of related companies till disposal of cases.

"I'm sure these stringent provisions are going to discourage many PSI companies to vie for the job in Bangladesh," said a top PSI executive, preferring not to be named.

"The sweeping allegations of irregularities against PSI companies are baseless. It's always a fact that PSI companies were involved in under-invoicing to help cause revenue loss," he said, adding that there are a lot of instances where PSI companies upped the declared prices by importers significantly.

Clarification

FROM PAGE 1
3) The vehicle was imported by opening L/C with due permission from Bangladesh Bank.

4) Almost 200 percent tax, which includes Customs Duty, Supplementary Duty, VAT, AIT, License fee etc. was paid on the said vehicle.

5) The cost of the vehicle was financed through a loan taken from IIFDC at 14.75% interest.

6) The vehicle was cleared after a through investigation by a 5-member committee comprising high ranking customs officials.

7) Furthermore, a hearing was called by NBR after the vehicle was cleared by customs and I personally attended the hearing and provided detailed information and documentation on the said vehicle to their complete satisfaction.

Therefore, the mention of the "apparent over-pricing" in The Daily Star report is most unfortunate.