

BNP trying

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precious times of BNP are now trying to return to the political activities of the party, as the reformist faction appears to be on the retreat with the Khaleda-loyalists gaining ground.

Different district committees, acting on Delwar's directive, already started to take disciplinary actions against the dissident leaders who broke the chain of command by pushing for reforms in the party constitution without the consent of the detained chairperson of the party.

Barisal (north) unit of BNP on Tuesday made a decision to expel former BNP lawmakers Shah Abul Hossain, Zahiruddin Swapan and Mosharraf Hossain Mangu. The three are known to be close aides of Maj (ret) Hafizuddin Ahmed, the acting secretary general of the reformist faction.

Sunamganj district BNP has decided to relieve former lawmaker Nazir Hossain, a reformist leader, of the post of the president of the unit.

A number of other district units of the BNP are also planning similar actions against leaders loyal to the reformist faction of the party.

A Delwar-loyalist leader told The Daily Star last night, "District committee leaders don't want to accept those who tried to split the party. However, the decisions taken against the dissident leaders will be finalised after consulting the party chairperson."

Sources in the BNP said decisions of the district committees would not be implemented without the approval of secretary general who would get the final approval from BNP chief Khaleda.

When asked about the recent

Police want

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amount of money but will yield a good result in terms of improving overall policing," he added.

Tripura also stresses the need for increasing the number of police personnel to reduce pressure on the already overburdened force.

The department has only a 122,000-strong force to fight crimes and maintain law and order in a country of about 140 million people.

AIG Hasanul said inspectors, *SI and sergeants are playing a crucial role in the force but lagging behind from others in terms of status and salary.*

"If the proposal is implemented, the officials will be more inspired in discharging their duties," he observes.

Police officials said such raises have been brought to different other government services, but the post of inspector and SIs remains the same since the colonial rule.

They said they have to directly interact with the common people as well as remain very busy in conducting criminal investigations and thus deserve the proposed status and the salary structure.

"You cannot expect better services from them without offering them a better position and salary," the AIG noted.

Khaleda, Hasina

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meaningful without the presence of Khaleda Zia," Delwar said, adding that the BNP is an election-oriented party and they want to participate in the election but before that the party chief must be released.

BNP Joint Secretary General Nazrul Islam Khan said, "The dialogue would not be meaningful while the election would not be acceptable without Khaleda Zia. So, there is no reason to go to the dialogue without her."

Addressing a press conference at his Nam flat, Delwar said, "We have repeatedly said that the dialogue will not be successful without Khaleda. We said it in the pre-dialogue session too."

"How clear a stand do you want from us?" he said pointing at the government.

"The government has adopted a strategy to use the dialogue to implement its own plan but it will not be successful," he said.

Demanding the release of both Khaleda and Hasina, Delwar said the two party chiefs should be allowed to lead their parties to the dialogue for the sake of democracy.

Meanwhile, the government's chief spokesman for the dialogues Commerce Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman showed signs of stress in the government but remained optimistic about the participation of the AL and BNP.

"We have to understand the sentiments of all the political parties. We cannot say yet whether the dialogue will be successful without the participation of the two major parties," said Zillur, who is leading the talks with the two parties.

"We will sit with all parties, no matter what others say because we are trying to continue the dialogue as there is a potential for success," he said, calling on all sides to exercise patience.

steps taken by several district units, Lt Gen (ret) Mahbubur Rahman, a reformist leader and a member of BNP standing committee, told The Daily Star, "Some overzealous local leaders have been exploiting the situation and done these things. But I think the chairperson will not allow these."

These sorts of actions will hinder the unification process of the party and will be disastrous for the party, he added.

Meanwhile, the reformist faction that appeared to be a threat to the leadership of Khaleda is now desperately looking for dignified means to get back to the mainstream of the party and many faction leaders have been openly expressing their loyalty to the detained party chief.

The recent remarks of reformist leader M Saifur Rahman came as a major blow to his compatriots. Rahman, before departing the country for treatment overseas, said the reformists only know how to split a party.

Torrential rain kills 53 in China

AFP, Beijing

The death toll from torrential rains in China climbed to 53, state media reported yesterday, after people were killed by collapsed buildings, floods and landslides in five provinces.

A further 28 people were missing, and 4,000 were stranded by floods, Xinhua news agency reported.

The southwestern province of Guizhou was the hardest hit, Xinhua said, with 36 people killed by flash floods and 14 missing.

Seventeen other people died in four other provinces in central, southern and eastern China.

Torrential rain in Guizhou on Tuesday caused a flood that destroyed 58 houses, two bridges, a highway, and power poles, causing blackouts in eight townships, affecting 26,000 people, Xinhua said.

Hundreds of buildings were buried by landslides or inundated by floods, officials with the provincial government told the news agency.

Tents, quilts and clothes have been sent to the affected area in Guizhou. About 4,000 people yesterday were stranded by floods caused by the weather in eastern Jiangxi province, Xinhua reported.

Around 100,000 people in the province were affected by the rainstorms, Xinhua said, quoting a local official.

The China Meteorological Administration warned yesterday more rain could hit the eastern and southern parts of the country over the next three days.

The prospect of bad weather in Sichuan -- struck by an earthquake over two weeks ago -- has threatened to hamper recovery efforts.

The quake measuring 8.0 on the Richter scale has killed more than 68,000 people and over 19,800 are still missing.

Bush's ex-spokesman blasts White House on Iraq

AFP, Washington

US President George W Bush's former chief spokesman sharply assailed the White House and the media over the Iraq war in book excerpts published yesterday, five months before the November elections.

Bush was not "open and forthright on Iraq," failed to plan for the post-invasion period, and sold the war with "propaganda" that reporters should have challenged more aggressively, Scott McClellan says in a brutal memoir.

"History appears poised to confirm what most Americans today have decided: that the decision to invade Iraq was a serious strategic blunder," McClellan writes, according to snippets quoted in the New York Times.

"No-one, including me, can know with absolute certainty how the war will be viewed decades from now when we can more fully understand its impact. What I do know is that war should only be waged when necessary, and the Iraq war was not necessary," he says.

In his 341-page account, titled "What Happened: Inside the Bush White House and Washington's Culture of Deception," McClellan also denounces the response to Hurricane Katrina and the outing of a covert CIA agent by top Bush aides.

McClellan, a Texas native from a political family, went to work for Bush when the future president was the state's governor, was a spokesman for Bush's 2000 campaign, served as chief White House deputy press secretary from January 2001 to July 2003, when he became the president's lead spokesman.

He resigned -- or was pushed out -- in April 2006 and left a month later, his credibility battered amid the scandal over the leak that Iraq war critic Joseph Wilson's wife, Valerie Plame Wilson, was a covert CIA agent.

McClellan accuses former top White House political strategist Karl Rove and I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, once a top aide to Vice President Dick Cheney, of misleading him into publicly denying they played any role in the revelation.

Bush was also deceived, "but the top White House officials who knew the truth -- including Rove, Libby, and possibly Vice President Cheney -- allowed me, even encouraged me, to repeat a lie," says McClellan.

EPR bail

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Court Bar Association (SCBA) against the earlier SC judgment, the court finally changed its decision and observed that the HC may consider bail petitions on three grounds in cases filed under EPR.

"Right to get bail is a fundamental and democratic right of the people. The earlier SC judgment had revoked that right. Lawyers and human rights organisations at home and abroad strongly protested and criticised the earlier judgment," Rafique said.

"Over 90 percent of the people detained under the state of emergency were arrested under EPR and they will now have a chance to get bail according to the observations in the Supreme Court judgment published today," he added.

SCBA President Barrister Shafique Ahmed said the SC's latest judgment proves that the association's stand for establishing the rule of law and fundamental human rights was correct.

"The earlier judgment of the Supreme Court was against democracy and the constitution," he said.

Following a writ petition filed by Moyez Uddin Sikder, a businessman of Khulna, the HC on April 22 last year, ruled that it has the jurisdiction to adjudicate bail petitions from persons facing criminal cases filed under the Emergency Power Rules 2007.

The amended EPR revoked the right to bail of those who are accused in criminal cases filed under EPR.

Mother commits

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house with her three daughters and two-year-old son Swakhawat Rana on Saturday.

Aklima's another daughter Marzia came to Titpur yesterday to take her mother home. But Aklima denied to go back to her husband's house.

Aklima along with her three daughters went to a nearby pond to take bath about 12:00 noon.

Later, Aklima was found hanging from a tree while the bodies of her three daughters were seen floating in the pond.

The bodies were sent to the Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH) morgue for autopsy.

Quoting Aklima's relatives, Officer-in-Charge of Phulpur Police Station Abul Quasem Azad said Aklima might have been suffering from mental illness.

"We are yet to figure out why she committed suicide after killing her three daughters," he added.

CG-formed PAC

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objected to the inclusion of incumbent government secretaries as members in the committee. The ad hoc PAC has three incumbent secretaries as its members.

CAG officials said incumbent government secretaries cannot be members of a PAC that investigates financial irregularities in government ministries and other government organisations. For the same reason, no incumbent minister can also be a member of a PAC, they added.

After the formation of the ad hoc PAC on December 18, its member secretary, Mahbub Ahmed who is also an additional secretary to the finance ministry, held an informal meeting with officials of CAG in an effort to start the operations of the committee. CAG officials said.

Another ad hoc PAC was formed earlier on October 19, 1983. The erstwhile chief martial law administrator (CMLA) formed the committee with the then law minister KA Bakar as its head. The then CMLA did not face any obstacle in forming that ad hoc PAC since the constitution was suspended back then. But now, under the current state of emergency the constitution is not suspended, the CAG officials said.

With the dissolution of the eighth parliament on October 27 of last year the immediate past PAC was also dissolved. A new parliament was supposed to be formed following the January 22 general elections, which was stalled due to a political crisis that is still plaguing the country.

Now a new parliament is expected to be formed in early 2009, as the stalled election is scheduled to be held on the third week of December this year. So, resumption of PAC's activity is unlikely in the next eight months.

In absence of a PAC, the number of unresolved audit reports involving hundreds of crores of taka, and the cases of retired government officials who are not getting their pensions due to unsettled objections, are increasing. Moreover, recovery of

public money that might have been misappropriated has also been stalling.

HOWAD HOC PAC WAS FORMED
Following the World Bank's advice, the office of CAG in July last year sent a proposal to the finance ministry to form the ad hoc PAC. It however asked the finance ministry to consult with the law ministry as the formation of it had legal matters involved.

CAG is authorised to audit all the income and expenditure of the government, and reports it to the parliament through the president, and PAC adjudicates all objections to the audit reports.

CAG suggested the government last year to form an ad hoc PAC comprising former justices, former government officials, academics, and politicians.

The law ministry also okayed the formation of an ad hoc PAC, and the finance ministry formed the committee headed by the then law adviser Mainul Hossain, sources in the finance ministry said.

The other ten members of the ad hoc PAC are the incumbent director general of National Security Intelligence, incumbent secretary to the Parliament Secretariat, incumbent secretary to the Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division of planning ministry, incumbent chairman of the National Board of Revenue, an incumbent additional secretary to the Finance Division of finance ministry, incumbent president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry, President of the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry Saifuzzaman Chowdhury, former president of Dhaka District Bar Association Fakir Delwar Hossain, President of the Institute of Chartered Accountants Farhad Hossain, and Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman who was the chief of Power and Participation Research Centre before becoming an adviser to the caretaker government.

Gen Mustafiz

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court on behalf of his client.

Rezaur Rahman told the court that the former army chief had been suffering from heart disease and he was brought to the court in a stretcher, as he even could not sit in a wheelchair.

According to the doctors, he needs to undergo a bypass surgery, the lawyer said adding that in this situation, taking him out of hospital might prove fatal for him.

At that point, Sheikh Hasina from the dock said, "Who will take responsibility if he dies while being taken to the court?" If that happens, a murder case will be filed, she warned.

All other accused in the case were also present in the court yesterday.

As the trial proceedings began, the defence lawyers told the judge that they would not be able to take part in the hearing until they receive necessary case documents. The defence also appealed to meet Sheikh Hasina next Saturday to discuss about the case.

Chief Special Public Prosecutor Sharfuddin Khan Mukul proposed granting interim bail to Gen (ret) Mustafiz until the next date of the hearing.

After holding hearing for nearly half an hour, the court passed the orders and adjourned until June 2. The ailing former army chief was also taken back to the hospital.

Tarique's wife

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Commission (ACC) against the HC order that stayed the proceedings against Zubaida in the case filed by the ACC.

The apex court also ordered both the parties of the case to take steps for disposing of the HC ruling.

Zubaida's lawyer advocate Khondker Mahbub Uddin Ahmed said they would now take steps for the hearing of another HC ruling that asked the ACC to explain within two weeks why the case shall not be quashed.

The Appellate Division also fixed June 4 for the hearing of another appeal filed by the ACC against an HC order that stayed the proceedings against Tarique Rahman in the same case. The proceedings against Tarique were stayed by the HC on October 1 last year.

The HC on April 8 stayed the proceedings against Zubaida for two months after she filed a petition with a plea to quash the case against her. The HC at the time also issued a ruling, asking the ACC to explain within two weeks why the case against her shall not be quashed.

Following the order, the ACC filed a leave to appeal with the SC, seeking to overturn the HC order.

Zahirul Huda, a deputy director at the ACC, filed the case with Kafilur Police Station on September 26 last year against Tarique, his wife Zubaida and her mother Iqbal Mand Banu for amassing wealth through illegal means and for concealing information in their wealth statements submitted to the ACC. Zubaida and her mother were accused of aiding and abet-

US envoy

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but added that he witnessed seriousness on the part of the advisers. "Ultimately it is the people to decide."

Replying to a question about the state of emergency, the US envoy said he and his government continue to believe that it is difficult to hold free, fair and credible elections under the state of emergency.

He, however, said he is encouraged to know that the caretaker government has taken some steps to ease the emergency and hoped that the general elections would be held without the emergency.

The ambassador said he had fruitful meeting with the home adviser where they discussed bilateral issues, law and order and the election roadmap.

He said he was reassured by the adviser that the election roadmap is in place to hold free, fair and credible elections by December this year.

Earlier, Ambassador Moriarty met Communications Adviser Ghulam Quader at his ministry.

India won't ease ban on rice export

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India is not considering easing the ban on export of rice despite a promise of bumper harvest in the country this year.

Indian Commerce Secretary GK Pillai said this to journalists in New Delhi on Tuesday against the backdrop of media reports that India was considering limited export of rice to neighbouring countries as well as to a few 'strategically important West African countries.'

India, like other major rice exporting countries in Asia, banned the export of non-basmati rice in March this year after enforcing a series of partial restrictions on the export of rice in a bid to boost supply in the domestic market and contain the rising trend of inflation in the country.

Meanwhile, India relaxed the ban on export of cement ahead of the monsoon when local demand for construction materials is expected to fall.

However, export of cement will only be allowed from ports in the western state of Gujarat, said a notification issued on Tuesday by Director General of Foreign Trade.

The government had banned the export of cement in April this year to increase its availability in the domestic market in an attempt to check its rising prices.

Earlier this month, the government of India also allowed export of cement and cement clinkers to Nepal.

Nepal's monarchy

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king and royal family will automatically come to an end," it says, also declaring May 29 as 'Republic Day.'

The declaration also states that Gyanendra's main palace will be transformed into a museum.

Saudi govt

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the Bangladesh Embassy in Riyadh of the matter, it is yet to take any step.

However, Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Secretary Abdul Matin Chowdhury said Riyadh has not officially informed them of any decision on not issuing residential permits for Bangladeshi workers who want to join new jobs on expiry of their present contracts.

Saudi Arabia in March this year decided to introduce a nation-based quota system for foreign workers.

Later, Saudi Labour Minister Ghazi Al-Gosabi declared a partial ban on recruitment of Bangladeshis as house help and agricultural labourers.

He also said recruitment of Bangladeshis would be limited to Saudi organisations that need qualified workers in the medical and engineering sectors.

Binod Bihari Chy

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his blood below than normal.

Binod, one of the few surviving revolutionaries, who fought against the British colonial regime alongside Masterda Surya Sen, is now 98.

He is now under the supervision of CMCH Cardiology Department Head Dr AKM Manjur Morshed.

Dr Manjur said Binod is suffering from anaemia and lung complications.

"Besides, he has been suffering from heart complications for a long time," he said, adding that a medical board would be formed today to examine the overall condition of the veteran revolutionary who had a pacemaker fitted four years back.

Relatives and well-wishers of the revolutionary leader thronged the hospital since morning to know about his physical condition.

Special court

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forces, including the army, paramilitary forces and the police, of violating human rights with impunity through "torture and other ill-treatment and alleged extrajudicial executions".

"Army personnel accused of human rights violations remained almost entirely outside the purview of civilian judicial accountability mechanisms," reports the AL.

Al Secretary General Irene Khan wrote to Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed last November, urging him to launch an unrestricted enquiry into human rights violations by security forces.

The report observes that the police lack adequate training and equipment, effective accountability and oversight mechanisms.

It reports that wide-ranging media restrictions, although not strictly enforced, compelled the media to intensify self-censorship.

"Journalists were threatened with arrest if they criticised intelligence agencies or the army," it says, adding that human rights activists and lawyers have also fallen victims to state detention, torture or threats.

"As in previous years, human rights defenders were subjected to arbitrary detention and tortures. Lawyers were allegedly threatened with arrest on corruption charges if they took up high-profile cases," says the AL, which operates in over 150 countries.

The report also reports of continued violence against women and the lack of government action to bring war criminals to justice.

China for peaceful ties with Taiwan

AFP, Beijing

Chinese President Hu Jintao called for peaceful relations with Taiwan as he met the head of the island's ruling party here yesterday in the highest-level contact since the two sides split in 1949.

Putting aside decades of tensions that have made the Taiwan Strait one of the world's potential flashpoints, Hu shook hands with Kuomintang chairman Wu Poh-hsiung during a red-carpet welcome at the Great Hall of the People.

The pair then posed with their delegations for a photograph before heading into their historic meeting, with the events broadcast on China's state-run television.

"Based on the past exchanges and communications between the two parties, and under the new situation, I hope we can promote cross-strait relations, exchange opinions and look to the future, and push forward the peaceful development of cross-strait relations," Hu said in his opening remarks to the meeting.

Wu in turn said the Chinese and Taiwanese should make sure that their people never take up arms against each other again, in comments that also touched on this month's devastating earthquake in China's southwest.

"We cannot guarantee there won't be any natural disasters any more on both sides of the strait, but through our mutual efforts, we can ensure there is no war," he said.

Wednesday's meeting is part of a dramatic easing of tensions between China and Taiwan in recent months that is likely to see the two sides quickly resume a formal dialogue that has been suspended for over a decade.

The Kuomintang's defeat of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in Taiwan's presidential polls in March has been the trigger for the rapprochement.

Ma Ying-jeou, who was sworn in as president last week, has taken a much more conciliatory approach with China than his predecessor, Chen Shui-bian, whose pro-independence rhetoric angered the mainland's communist leadership.

China and Taiwan split at the end of a civil war in 1949, with the Kuomintang (KMT) nationalist forces retreating to the island after the communists took control of the mainland.

For decades, the KMT and China's Communist Party were bitter foes. But the KMT in recent years staked out a platform of reconciliation in contrast to Chen's DPP.

China remains determined to bring Taiwan back into its political fold, and repeatedly warned during Chen's eight years in power that it was prepared to use force to do so.

In some of the most significant developments of the recent thaw, Ma pledged to deepen economic links between the two sides, vowed not to enter an arms race and pushed for a restart of a formal bilateral dialogue.

Taiwan said last week the bilateral talks, which have not been held for more than a decade, would resume next month with the aim of building closer trade and tourism links.

Zardari, Sharif

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The PML-N wants the reinstatement of the sacked judiciary in line with the Murree Declaration, and is ready to support the much anticipated reforms package in return. The sources said Zardari assured the PML-N that the sacked judges would soon be restored, but did not go into details.

Impeachment: They said former premier Nawaz Sharif also pressed Zardari for the impeachment of President Pervez Musharraf as soon as possible. "Nawaz was of the view that the coalition government should impeach President Musharraf when they move the constitutional reforms package in parliament," a source said.

The sources said Nawaz Sharif assured his party's support to the PPP in the coming budget session. Zardari, Aftab Shaban Mirani, Nayyar Hussain Bukhari and Farzana Raja represented the PPP in the meeting, and Nawaz, Shahbaz Sharif, Ishaq Dar, Nisar Ali Khan and Ahsan Iqbal represented the PML-N.

Talking to reporters, PML-N Information Secretary Ahsan Iqbal said Zardari shared the key points of the proposed package in the meeting. "Zardari briefed our party about the highlights of constitutional package... the copy of draft package will be handed over to us in the coming days," he said.

He said the PML-N would support the reforms package if it is in line with the Charter of Democracy (CoD). "Zardari told us that this constitutional package is not final and PPP will seek input from all the coalition partners," he said.

Iqbal said the PML-N wanted the restoration of the sacked judges. "They also agreed that sacked judges should be reinstated soon," he said.

Iqbal said the PML-N also wants impeachment of President Musharraf to let democracy flourish

Wu told Taiwanese reporters after his meeting with Hu that the Chinese president had agreed to restart the talks soon, but no date was set.

"We have good reason to believe that the two sides can reopen dialogue soon, because Mr Hu made it clear that it 'should be done within the shortest period of time'," Wu said.

Key issues to be discussed in the dialogue would be starting weekend passenger charter and cargo flights as well as allowing more Chinese tourists to visit Taiwan.

China has also warmly welcomed Taiwan's help in providing medical aid and other relief following the earthquake that hit the southwestern province of Sichuan on May 12, and Hu again expressed gratitude.

"The loving heart and heart-rending behaviour of the Taiwan compatriots deeply moved us," he said in his opening remarks.

"On behalf of the mainland compatriots, especially compatriots in quake-hit areas, I would like to express our sincere appreciation and thanks to our compatriots in Taiwan."