

Election gears

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division at Rangpur Town Hall yesterday. JP Chairman HM Ershad said the BNP-led four-party alliance would not be able to resist the local government elections because it had become the demand of the people of the country.

"People will foil their attempt to resist the local government elections," Ershad added, reports our correspondent in Rangpur.

Ershad praised the government for reintroducing the upazila parishad.

Asked about the government's position on the four-party alliance's threat to resist the polls, Communications Adviser Ghulam Quader yesterday told reporters that any attempt to resist local government elections slated for August 4 would be unwise.

"I do not think the political parties will create obstacle to holding of the local government elections... Maybe we have not been able to communicate with them effectively... We will try to convince them; they will certainly understand," Quader said.

The local government elections are non-political and the caretaker government is not any party to contest the polls, he said, adding, "So, it is not logical to resist the elections."

The government would like to see decentralisation of power, he said, pointing out that elections are on the EC road map.

On holding the upazila elections, Quader said the High Court has laid down strong and clear instructions in this regard which has to be followed.

But the Workers' Party termed the communications adviser's speech "unfounded". The government is holding the local government election going beyond its constitutional jurisdiction and complicating the political situation, it said in a statement.

Addressing an extended meeting of Bagerhat district unit of the party, AL Organising Secretary Mannan said the government should hold the national election first to overcome the existing crises in the country. He demanded that the government withdraw the local government electoral schedule "to show respect to the people's demands".

Chaired by district AL President Dr Mommol Hossain, the meeting directed party leaders to strengthen the organisation for the polls and press home the party's six-point demand including permanent and unconditional release of Sheikh Hasina, lifting of the state of emergency, and announcement of parliamentary poll schedule.

GRASSROOTS LEVEL POLL CAMPAIGN

Our Mymensingh correspondent

Aminul Islam reports that following announcement of the electoral

husband loaned her Tk 17 lakh.

Altaf also said that he purchased a jeep at Tk 8 lakh, but the actual price of the vehicle was Tk 20.17 lakh. Besides, he showed low price of the car he purchased in his wife's name.

Altaf Hossain submitted his wealth statement to the ACC on July 25, 2007 saying that he has wealth worth Tk 3.25 crore.

The BNP leader was arrested on May 28, 2007 for his alleged involvement in corruption.

SIGMA HUDA CASE
Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Golam Rabbani passed the order rejecting the bail petition for Sigma Huda after her lawyers submitted it.

Her husband, detained BNP leader Nazmul Huda, is the principal accused in the bribery case.

On June 18, ACC Assistant Director Belal Hossain filed the case with Motijheel Police Station accusing the couple of taking Tk 6 lakh bribe from a contractor of Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge Authority.

The case mentioned that Nazmul Huda demanded bribes from the owner of a bridge maintenance firm in exchange for a work order for the maintenance of the Jamuna Bridge.

Huda was communications minister at that time.

As per his demand, the owner of the firm provided Huda Tk 6 lakh to the account of weekly Khoboror Antorale at the Amin court (Motijheel) branch of Agrani Bank in 20 cheques between September 30, 2004 and October 18, 2006, the case statement said.

Sigma Huda, who used to run the weekly, drew the money from the bank, the complainant said.

Nazmul Huda was earlier given different terms of punishment in bribery, corruption and extortion cases.

On the other hand, Sigma was acquitted of two extortion cases and given three years' jail a case on charges of aiding and abetting her husband in taking Tk 2.4 crore bribe from the proprietor of a construction firm.

On June 5, the HC granted three months' ad interim bail to Sigma Huda in the bribery case under emergency power rules (EPR).

schedule aspirant candidates for the posts of municipal mayor and ward councillors in Phulbaria Municipality launched their electoral campaign.

The candidates include local BNP leaders—Mujibur Rahman, the incumbent chairman of the municipality and President of municipal BNP unit, Abdullah Mustaq, Chand Mahmud Sarker and Mohammad Kabir Hossain, and AL leaders Golam Kibria and Nurul Islam.

Abdullah Mustaq told The Daily Star that the environment is favourable for the election.

Our correspondent in Sylhet reports: Election to Golapganj Municipality is scheduled for August 4. This is the second election for the small township since its inception in 2001.

Meanwhile, about 100 aspirants for the post of ward councillors were disappointed yesterday as they were informed that the nomination forms from the EC did not yet arrive.

Deputy Election Commissioner of Sylhet Division Khondker Mizanur Rahman said the nomination papers would be available from today.

Detained Sylhet City Corporation Mayor Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran, city unit AL General Secretary Misbah Uddin Siraj, sadar upazila Chairman Babul Hossain Babul, BNP city unit General Secretary Nasim Hossain, former president of the district unit BNP MA Haque, JP leaders Abdus Samad Nazrul and Kunu Mia, and Jamaat-e-Islami leader Dr Shafigur Rahman are the probable candidates for city corporation mayor.

The probable candidates for Golapganj Municipality mayor include sitting Chairman Zakaria Ahmed Paplu, former UP chairman and AL Joint Secretary Sirajul Jabbar Chowdhury, former UP chairman Fazlul Haque, municipal AL General Secretary Syed Misbah Uddin, upazila Juba Dal chief Alekuzzaman, municipal BNP Secretary Mushiqr Rahman Mohi and JP leader Mamunur Rashid. Besides, over 100 candidates are there for the councillorship of ward-9. About 25 women are expected to contest for the three reserved seats.

22 get CIP status

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offices are Anisul Haq, president of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), Waliur Rahman Bhuiyan, president of Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), Saifuzzaman Chowdhury, president of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCC), Mirza Nurul Gani (Shovon), president of National Association of Small and Cottage Industries of Bangladesh (Nascib), Abdul Hai Sarker, president of Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA), Nasreen Awal Mintoo, president of Women Entrepreneurs' Association of Bangladesh (WEAB) and MA Shahid, acting president of Bangladesh Chamber of Industries (BCI).

Individuals nominated under the large-scale industry category are Gulam Mostafa, chairman of Deshbandhu Sugar Mills Limited, Masih UI Karim, adviser of the board of directors of Berger Paints Bangladesh Limited, Ali Hossain Akber Ali, managing director of Bangladesh Steel and Re-rolling Mills (BSRM) Limited, Riazuddin Al Mamun, managing director of Epyllion Group, Mohammad Shahjahan, chairman of Jalal Ahmed Spinning Mills Limited, Mohammad Gulam Faruque, managing director of F S Sweaters Limited, Ahsan Khan Chowdhury, director of Agricultural Marketing Company Limited and Mahbub Jamil, managing director of Singer Bangladesh Limited.

Nominated under the medium-scale industries are Maj Gen (ret'd) Amjad Khan, managing director of Pran Foods Limited, M Mozbar Rahman, managing director of BRB Polymer Limited, Engineer Mohammad Nurul Haque, director of Sagar Garments Limited, Mohammad Mizbar Rahman, managing director of Kiam Metal Industries Limited and M Miraj Hossain, managing director of MP Sweaters Limited.

Managing director of MBM Garments Limited Mahmudur Rahman and chairman of Tushuka Fashions Limited Arshad Jamal were nominated as CIP under the small-scale industries category.

The industries ministry statement said the CIP (industries) cards will be considered as entry passes in the secretariat. The cardholders will be invited to national programmes as well as to civic reception organised by city corporations.

The CIPs will enjoy preference when it comes to booking seats in public transport for business tours, the ministry statement said.

The foreign ministry will send letters of introduction to embassies and high commissions in Dhaka so the CIP could easily get visas.

They will also be able to enjoy the facilities of VIP Lounge-2 in airports during their travel.

Delwar seeks

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the government has taken the city corporation and municipality elections as a 'test case' and after those elections it will hold upazila elections to elect its own people through rigged polls.

"They [the people in the government] want to establish a rubber stamp parliament with the help of some foreigners," he quipped urging the people to come forward to resist such 'conspiracies'.

Delwar further alleged that the government plans to form an electoral college with more than 600 chairmen and members of local government institutions to elect the country's president.

He went on saying the people already identified those who had destroyed the country's democracy in a planned way in the name of establishing it.

Meanwhile, leaders of Jatiyatabadi Muktojodha Dal (JMD) yesterday demanded a judicial inquiry commission for investigating the alleged torture of detained BNP chairpersons' sons Tarique Rahman and Ararat Rahman, who are also in detention.

JMD, a front organisation of BNP, also asked the government to release Khaleda Zia and to send her two sons abroad for treatment without further delay. Putting out a 48-hour ultimatum to the government for meeting the demand, JMD warned the interim administration that it will be forced to announce demonstration programmes otherwise.

"Tarique was in good health when he was arrested. But he was tortured during remand. Two of his spinal discs were broken during the remand," Sohrab Uddin, president of JMD, alleged at a news briefing held in Delwar's Namflat in the city.

He claimed that Koko, younger son of Khaleda Zia, also suffered torture in detention, and demanded punishment for those who were involved.

Matin

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and the people involved in it.

The NCC chairman said there would be more coordination between the NCC, law ministry, Anti-Corruption Commission and the attorney general's office in dealing with the cases.

Security

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steps will be taken on the basis of intelligence reports and effectiveness of the primary measures taken, the IGP explained.

"Although the local body elections are non-political, we will be taking extra measures," he added.

Non-govt teachers

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the National Front of Teachers and Employees (NFTE), a combine of eleven teachers' organisations.

Around 4.7 lakh teachers and employees of more than 30,000 non-government high schools, colleges and madrasas under different teachers' organisations had announced a series of programmes in protest at the finance adviser's not including teachers as recipients of dearness allowance.

The programmes that included among others hunger strike were called off yesterday after the finance adviser's assurance that the teachers too would be granted 20 percent dearness allowance to cope with the price spiral.

"We are pleased that the caretaker government has decided to meet our demands. On behalf of the community, I thank the government for the wise decision," said Prof Quazi Farruque Ahmed, chief co-ordinator of NFTE.

At the meeting, the NFTE brought forward a number of recommendations on how to develop the education system and improve quality of education and human resources.

The teacher leaders also proposed that the government introduce unemployment allowance for the post-graduate students until they get a job and encourage them undertake self-employment projects. They also demanded special allocation for measures to check dropouts from higher secondary level.

Meanwhile, M Abul Bashar Hawlader, president of Bangladesh Shikshak Samity, has hailed the government's decision to provide 20 percent dearness allowance for the MPO-listed teachers.

Polls to be free

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directors on the reforms the interim government has brought about in order to strengthen governance and democracy in the country. These include reforms in the Election Commission, the Anti-Corruption Commission and the Public Service Commission, separation of the judiciary from the executive, formation of the Local Government Commission and the National Human Rights Commission and formulation of the Right to Information Act.

Fakhruddin said the government is acting not only to make the next general election free, fair and credible, but also all future general elections.

The chief adviser's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim briefed newsmen after the meeting.

ADB Country Director Hua Du was present.

Govt sectors limp

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retirement), leaving more posts vacant.

At a secretary-level meeting on April 28 to review activities of the government, top bureaucrats expressed concern over lack of civil servants. They said stalemate in recruitment process is affecting government activities in various sectors.

Several secretaries pointed out that a civil servant has to perform many duties resulting in public suffering.

"Different sectors have already been burdened with huge workload. The government officials now bear the burden of overseeing the financial, development and administrative activities," a top official of the establishment ministry told The Daily Star.

The deputy commissioners at their meeting three months ago also raised the same problem saying posts at district and upazila levels are vacant. They identified the shortage of officials as the main cause for low performance in providing service to the people.

At the meeting of deputy commissioners three months ago also pointed the same problem and said many civil servant posts in upazila and district levels are vacant which is the main cause for low performance in providing service to the people.

The DCs asked the establishment ministry to recruit fresh officials more rapidly, especially before the next general elections.

However, recruitment of officials through the 27th BCS has been stalled due to a case pending in the court.

IMF to discuss

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the finance adviser has already given such signal.

This apart, the military-backed administration has taken a number of steps to contain the skyrocketing prices of essentials and will take more if necessary, the official noted.

The Fund wants to know how robust the growth rebound projection was in the second half of FY2007-08 and how international price rises and domestic inflation have affected economic activity.

Earlier in April last year, it forecast that the economy would grow by 5.5 percent, while the finance adviser projected it to be 6.21 percent for the outgoing fiscal year, officials concerned said.

In its questionnaire, the IMF seeks details of the pricing formula for petroleum products and monthly sales volumes for diesel, gasoline and kerosene. It asks how much of the poor performance of the state-owned enterprises (SoEs) is attributable to under-pricing of public services.

Further questions, "What is the level of subsidies required to eliminate losses in BPC (Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation) and other SoEs, including the funds needed to address depreciation of capital? What progress has been made in reducing the operating costs of BPC and other key SoEs?"

"What has been the progress on SoE privatisation and closures, including the effect on employment?"

The Fund also asks the government for an update of tax policy measures since the FY08 budget and options being considered for the upcoming fiscal year. It also wants to know the status of tax policy unit and tax administration reforms.

Then it queries about the government's plans regarding sale of Rupali Bank, and asks if

Dr Kamal

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documents seized from her Sudha Sadan residence after her arrest in July last year.

He, however, did not mention the Awami League chief's name.

Replying to a query the Gono Forum president said, "People want to know under which law police returned the properties seized from the arrestees. The confiscated properties would have to be added to welfare funds and used for people's welfare."

He also urged the government not to let people become hostage at the hands of corrupt people again for the sake of temporary benefits.

Dr Kamal alleged that those who were engaged in corruption and plundering are now creating divisions among people to capture power.

Referring to the opinions given by various quarters during his recent visit to Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj, Dr Kamal said people expect that an effective parliament would be in place through holding of a free, fair and credible election.

He also criticised the state-owned BTJ for not letting the voices of common people be heard.

A writ was filed on behalf of 110 candidates of the 27th BCS examinations after the authorities cancelled the final results on May 30 last year due to alleged irregularities.

The High Court stayed the publication of fresh results until the case is dissolved. The viva ended recently but PSC could not publish the result.

Sources in PSC say it will take at least two years to complete the recruitment through the 28th BCS.

Candidates, government officials, and PSC officials suggest increasing the posts, as the preliminary test, first step of the process, has yet to start.

"The caretaker government should increase the number of posts in 28th BCS and the circular of 29th BCS should be issued immediately to fill up the vacant posts in the different cadre service," said Mosharaf Hossain, a BCS candidate who recently completed master's degree from Dhaka University.

PSC Member Suraiya Begum said the number of posts in 28th BCS can be increased anytime if government takes a decision to that end.

"We have a plan to issue BCS circular every year and complete all recruitment process in one year," she told The Daily Star.

After former cabinet secretary Saadat Hussain took over as the PSC chairman, many expected that recruitment process would now be transparent and quick.

But PSC could not recruit a single official in over one year of service by the Saadat Hussain-led body.

Personal details

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The new laws also allow appeals challenging selections of candidates as well as rejections of applicants. The appellate authorities will settle the appeals, but those have to be filed within two days of these selections or rejections.

The immediate past electoral laws allowed appeals only against rejections.

The EC officials said similar provisions for public access to information about candidates might also be incorporated in the rules for polls to union and upazila parishads.

32 jobseekers

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Kula Lumpur spending Tk 1,80,000, told UNB over the phone that he did not even know what their fault is.

"We've already run out of food, water and money; if nobody comes for our rescue, we'll not survive in the depot as we don't have money to buy food," he said.

Another worker said, "After waiting for more than 10 months after giving them money, the recruiting agency has now sent us to a hell where nobody helps us out."

Moudud

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On September 16 last year, the ACC filed the case under the Emergency Power Rules with Gulshan Police Station against Moudud on charge of possessing wealth beyond his known sources of income and withholding information about his assets.

In the case it was alleged that the former law minister in his statement submitted to the anti-graft body had concealed information about his actual wealth and wealth accumulated through illegal means.

According to the case, Moudud did not declare wealth worth Tk 4,40,37,375. He has assets to the tune of Tk 7,38,48,237, which is disproportionate to the known sources of his income.

Moudud filed a writ petition with the HC, challenging the legality of the proceedings of the case against him. Upon the petition, the HC on September 30 last year stayed the proceedings of the case and issued a rule upon the government and the ACC to show cause as to why the case should not be declared illegal.

The HC recently discharged the rule clearing the way for proceeding with the trial.

Moudud yesterday filed a leave to appeal with the SC against the HC verdict. He also prayed to the apex court for staying the trial proceedings of the case.

Barrister Rafique-ul Huq appeared for Moudud.

Niko graft case

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(AL) chief, filed a petition to it to have the graft case cancelled.

Advocate Sahara Khatun represented Hasina as he had been exempted from appearing personally at trial proceedings in the court during her stay overseas for medical treatment.

Two other accused in the case -- former power secretary Dr Toufique-e-Alahi Chowdhury and former state minister for power Prof Rafiqul Islam -- were produced before the court.

Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) Deputy Director MM Sabbir Hasan filed the case with Tejgaon Police Station on December 9 last year.

Charge sheet in the case was submitted on May 7, 2008, accusing nine people of abuse of power, office and authority in handing over three 'abandoned' gas fields to Canadian oil and gas exploration company Niko.

The charges say Hasina as the then prime minister, approved the Niko deal in 2001, causing a loss of Tk 13.6 crore to the state exchequer.

Other accused include former energy secretary M Akmal Hossain, former vice-president of Niko Resources Ltd Bangladesh Kashem Sharif, former chairman of Petrobangla Mosharraf Hossain and its former director Syed Anwarul Haque.

New UK envoy

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South Asia department.

"I am delighted to have been appointed to serve in Bangladesh," Evans said in a press release.

"There is broad and positive engagement on a wide range of common interests: development, democracy, security, education, trade, migration between the two nations. Our futures are interlinked in so many ways," The British High Commission press release quoted him as saying.

Evans said there is a 'unique thread' permeating the bilateral relationship because the two countries which are "bound by deep personal and historical ties and shared values."

Evans replaces the Bangladeshi-born Anwar Chowdhury, who has taken up a senior post at the FCO.

Saudi Arabia to raise oil production

AP, Jeddah

Saudi Arabia is willing to produce more oil if customers need it, the kingdom's oil minister said yesterday without citing any specific output increase.

Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, has been under intense pressure from the US and other oil consumers to increase its crude output to help slow the soaring price of oil.

The kingdom already announced modest increases and said it would pump 9.7 million barrels a day beginning in July. But those increases have not done much to stem the skyrocketing price of oil, which closed near \$135 a barrel on Friday.

The high prices are affecting consumers and economies across the United States, Europe and much of the world. Many countries have experienced social unrest as rising fuel prices have driven significant increases in the cost of food and other basic goods.

The cost of gasoline has also become a sore point in the U.S. presidential race, with U.S. President George W. Bush and Republican candidate John McCain calling for lifting of a long-standing ban on offshore oil and gas drilling to increase domestic oil production. But Democratic candidate Barack Obama has said such steps will do nothing in the short term to ease American consumer's pain.

It was unclear if Oil Minister Ali al-Naimi's remarks Sunday at a high-level oil summit in the port city of Jeddah would quell concerns.

Al-Naimi, who was expected to formally make the announcements in a speech later Sunday, reiterated his government's position that the recent run-up in prices has not been caused by a supply shortage. But he said he also believes each country must do what it can "to alleviate these difficult conditions."

For the remainder of the year "Saudi Arabia is willing to produce additional barrels of crude oil above and beyond the 9.7 million barrels per day which we plan to produce during the month of July, if demand for such quantities materializes and our customers tell us they are needed," al-Naimi said in the speech, a copy of which was obtained by The Associated Press in advance.

Al-Naimi also said that the kingdom was willing to invest to boost its spare oil production capacity above the current 12.5 million barrels per day planned for the end of 2009, reversing previous statements that the country would not go beyond that figure.

"In addition, we have identified a series of future crude oil mega-increments totaling another 2.5 million barrels per day of capacity that could be built if and when crude oil demand levels warrant their development," he said.

The U.S. and other Western nations have put increasing pressure on Saudi Arabia to increase production, saying insufficient oil production has not kept pace with growing demand.

Earlier Sunday, King Abdullah also said Saudi Arabia was not to blame for soaring oil prices and instead pointed his finger at speculators, high fuel taxes in consuming countries and increased oil consumption in developing economies.

"There are several factors behind the unjustified, swift rise in oil prices and they are: Speculators who play the market out of selfish

9 killed

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"This (toll) will definitely rise dramatically when we get the listings from the ship," he said, referring to the Princess of the Stars ferry that sank off Sibuyan island amid heavy seas on Saturday.

Floodwaters in Iloilo rose so swiftly that many residents were forced to take refuge on rooftops or in the branches of tall trees, said provincial administrator Manuel Mejorada.

The flooding in Iloilo eased Sunday, allowing vehicles to reach once-flooded areas, Mejorada said.

Over 35,000 families had to be evacuated from their homes due to the flooding and risk of landslides, the civil defence officials said.

Electricity was knocked out in Iloilo and surrounding areas and officials do not expect power to be restored for about a week.

Telephone lines and cellphone towers were down in many areas.

Manila and surrounding areas were lashed by the typhoon in the early hours of Sunday, with power being knocked out in large parts of the city and many domestic and international flights cancelled.

There were no immediate reports of deaths or damage in the capital but the Education Department cancelled classes on all levels in Metro Manila and surrounding areas on Monday.

The typhoon has continued to move northwest, passing Metropolitan Manila and over the northern half of the main island of Luzon.

Typhoon Fengshen, packing maximum winds of 120 kilometres per hour (75 miles per hour) near the centre, is expected to move northwest at 15 kilometres per hour.